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# Seeking refuge in urban America : refugee students in an international public high school in California

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The University of San Francisco

SEEKING REFUGE IN URBAN AMERICA: REFUGEE STUDENTS IN AN  
INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
the Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by  
Nabila Massoumi  
San Francisco  
May, 2009

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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5/8/2009  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	
Researcher's Background .....	1
Background and Need .....	2
South Palm International High School .....	6
Statement of the Problem .....	8
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Significance and limitations of the Study .....	9
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	
Pre-Flight .....	11
Flight .....	12
Resettlement .....	15
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder .....	25
Refugee Children and Adolescents in the American Education System .....	29
Summary .....	32
III. METHODOLOGY	
Restatement of the Purpose and Overview .....	34
Research Design and Methodology .....	34
Research Setting .....	34
Population and Sample .....	37
Data Collection .....	38
Data Analysis .....	41
Protection of Human Subjects .....	41
IV. PROFILES	
Burma .....	42
Refugee Camp Life for Burmese Refugees in Thailand .....	47
Bee .....	48
Thura .....	50

Bhutan .....	51
Refugee Camp Life for Ethnic Nepalese from Butan in Nepal .....	56
Isha .....	58
kalpana .....	60
Tushar .....	61
Liberia .....	63
Refugee Camp Life for Liberians in Ivory Coast .....	69
Fabiola .....	72
Simon .....	73
Bella .....	74
Casandra .....	75
Mesketian Turks .....	76
Yosra .....	80

## V. FINDINGS

Overview Of Findings.....	82
Research Question #1 .....	82
Adversity and Poverty: Pre Arrival .....	83
Adversity and Poverty: Post Arrival .....	86
Motivation and Hope .....	87
Research Question #2 .....	90
Loss .....	90
Nostalgia .....	94
Fear .....	98
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder .....	100
Culture Shock .....	103
Safety .....	106
Community .....	109
Research Question #3 .....	115
Teacher Knowledge and Collaboration .....	115
Relevant Curriculum .....	117
Story and Narrative .....	121
Structure .....	124
Teachers and community Support After School .....	125

## VI. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Overview Of Findings.....	127
The Educational Experiences of Refugee Students .....	127
Adversity and Poverty .....	128
Motivation and Hope .....	129
School Community .....	130
Emotional and Psychological Needs of Refugee Students .....	131
Trauma and PTSD .....	132

Fear and Safety .....	133
Culture Shock .....	136
Academic Needs of Refugee Students .....	137
Teacher Knowledge and Collaboration .....	137
Story and Narrative .....	139
Recommendations for Future Research .....	141
Recommendations for Practice .....	143
Conclusion .....	144
REFERENCES .....	147

## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH QUESTION

#### Researcher's Background

My family and I escaped the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and were granted asylum in the United States in 1982. By the time we arrived in our host country, we had endured a harsh year of living in exile in Pakistan and Italy. My four siblings and I had missed one year of schooling, and none of us could speak, read or write in English.

Upon our arrival in Minnesota, we were placed two grades lower than our age because there was no one who could translate the placement assessment for us. Luckily, we moved to California six months later where a family friend translated the test and we were placed in age appropriate grades. After six months of Pull-Out English as a Second Language (ESL) in elementary school, I was mainstreamed in junior high school and expected to compete with other students in classes with no English learner support: I was thrown in to either sink or swim.

Throughout my schooling I was never asked why my family came to the United States: I was treated as an immigrant who chose to come to the US for economic prosperity. I knew my family did not choose to leave Afghanistan, and we were forced to escape in order to save our lives. Even though I suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, none of my teachers or counselors ever recognized the symptoms or offered any support. It was not until I was an adult in graduate school that I came to grieve the loss of my extended family and friends and began healing old wounds of trauma related to our abrupt exodus from my beloved homeland. As a result, I can identify, first hand, with refugee students' social, emotional, linguistic, political and economic tribulations to



succeed academically in the US.

### Background and Need

A refugee as defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is a person who

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 1951).

The Convention, mainly written to protect refugees after World War II, clearly spelled out who is a refugee and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from states parties to the document. Eventually, in order to broaden the convention which restricted refugees by definition to Europeans who lived outside of their country prior to 1951, it was augmented in 1967, removing its geographical and temporal restrictions.

Refugees are often seen as immigrants. However, there is a clear distinction between the two categories. Economic immigrants are individuals who emigrate in search for better jobs and economic security. Refugee immigrants are individuals fleeing persecution in their home country. Another important characteristic that distinguishes these two immigrant groups is their ability to return to their native country. Refugee immigrants are unable or unwilling to return home for fear or threat of persecution, and thus must make a life in the country that gives them refuge. Economic immigrants, on the other hand, are free from this constraint and can return home whenever they so desire. Ogbu notes the difference between minority groups who have been incorporated into their various societies voluntarily versus those who were forced to leave their homelands because of slavery, colonization or conquest (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). He asserts

involuntary minorities “usually resent the loss of their former freedom and they perceive the social, political and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression” (p. 6).

Haines (1997) writes the decision to flee the country is a difficult and dangerous one that has severe consequences for those involved. Most of the time, refugees, such as the ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan, must flee their homes and villages without warning, taking with them only the clothes on their backs. Usually these victims of war and oppression flee in large numbers, arriving in poor, underdeveloped nations without the means to care for them. Long and indefinite stays of Ethiopians in the Sudan, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran and eastern Europeans in a variety of transit countries may be less life threatening, but provide their own dangers. Most of these developing countries lack the sound infrastructure needed to facilitate a massive humanitarian response. Making the situation worse, as did the influx of Liberian refugees in the Ivory Coast, the conflict that forced them from their homes may destabilize the region in which they have sought refuge.

Once the refugees resettle in the country of asylum, they must acclimate themselves to an entirely new and often unwelcoming culture. In addition, they may face economic and social strain including poverty, homelessness, criminal victimization, and socio-linguistic barriers. Portes and Zhou (1993) maintain unlike earlier newcomers, contemporary immigrants are not en route to the white middle class because both the immigrants and the country have changed drastically. They present a segmented assimilation model. According to segmented assimilation, an immigrant group’s mode of incorporation is determined by an interaction between governmental policy, societal

reception, and the strength of the co-ethnic community. The interaction dictates three forms of adaptation for the second generation including assimilation and acculturation into the white middle class, assimilation into poverty in the underclass and preservation of immigrant values with economic prosperity.

Noguera (2003) affirms white middle class parents often have access to “social capital” or resources and networks that enable them to exert influence on schools and school boards that serve their children. Currently, refugee families in South Palm have very little or no access to social networks and organizations and thus are deficient of social capital. This group of newcomers can not benefit from the capital that an already established community, such as Cubans in Florida, can offer them. Portes and Zhou’s (1993) proposed pattern of segmented assimilation and Noguera’s (2003) conceptualization of social capital begs to question the role of social capital in immigrant and refugee resettlement in the US.

Bendorz and Caldwell (2004) note a significant proportion of refugees have experienced severe trauma. They arrive in a state of mourning for their loss with a shattered sense of status and identity. Furthermore, many have been tortured, separated from their families, and subjected to personal and/or sexual violence. This sense of loss may be accompanied by a legacy of trauma including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), survivor guilt, depression, and mistrust of others.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a psychiatric disorder that occurs following the experience or witnessing of life threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, or violent personal assaults. This disorder can occur in men, women and children in Western and non-Western cultures and throughout the socioeconomic

spectrum. PTSD has different age and gender specific features. Kaplan (2002) notes the factors which contribute to the development of PTSD in children and adolescents include the severity of trauma, parental reaction to the trauma and the proximity of the trauma. Roysircar (2004) declares many children and adolescents experience lifelong damage to their mental health, physical well being and moral development as a result of exposure to violent traumatic events. He noted emotions of sadness and anger as well as aggressive outbursts, loss of consciousness, hostility, lack of belonging and recurring nightmares in his case study of a young Bosnian boy suffering from PTSD.

In addition to PTSD, family tensions often surface due to the social pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture, culture shock, loss of status, female versus male and child versus adult role reversals. Furnham & Bochner (1986) warn culture shock occurs as a result of a powerful disruption in one's routines, ego and self image due to a change in one's cultural or social environment. They maintain feelings of frustration, confusion and anger can arise from being overloaded with information to be learned about the dominant culture, and not knowing the appropriate behavior in a new environment.

Refugee families also experience role shock whereby their social roles in the new environment are not consistent with their previous self concept. Blackwell (2000) writes about a shift in family dynamics upon arrival.

When they arrive here, their parents are no longer the people they were with a place in the community, an understanding of how the world works, and ability to care for and teach their children. Instead they have become second class citizens, not allowed to work, recipients of charity, people unable to speak the language and unable to fill in even quite simple forms or complete the simplest of transactions without assistance (p. 8).

He declares parents may feel they no longer have the respect of their children and male household members from male dominant cultures may sense a loss of their authority as

head of their household. Loss of a social support system, usually provided by extended family, also prolongs management and coping with culture shock.

Although a few community organizations help the refugees resettle upon arrival to the United States, refugee students are often directed to the neighborhood public school. At school, there is little or no opportunity for these children to tell their stories and the atrocities they have witnessed so they can begin to heal their wounds. Refugee students are labeled English Learners and at best, placed in classes to help them learn English. Their emotional and psychological traumas are not addressed in either the classroom or through a school psychologist unless their symptoms are so severe that they must be tested for special education.

#### South Palm International High School

2007 marked the opening of a new international high school in California which promises to serve a population of English learner students who have been underserved nationally, statewide and locally. The International Network for Public Schools is a non-profit organization that grew out of the work of a group of international high schools in New York City. The network's mission is to provide quality education to recently arrived 9th through 12th grade students in urban school districts by developing and networking small high schools based on the International Schools' approach. It now supports nine New York City schools as well as South Palm International in California. The first school opened in 1985; two more followed in the 1990's. Since 2001, the network has opened and supported seven additional high schools with supplemental financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The newly opened International High School in South Palm is the only high

school specifically for newcomer students. According to California Department of Education, in 07-08, South Palm Unified School District enrolled 46,431 students, including charter schools. Out of those, 13,933 or 30% of students were English Learners. In addition, 68.5% of students received free or reduced price meals. South Palm's Refugee Student Assistance Program Coordinator claims over 2000 refugee students are enrolled in the district, but they have not been systematically identified.

The quaint and well manicured South Palm International High School is nestled in a middle class neighborhood of South Palm within walking distance of coffee shops and restaurants. It enrolls only students who have been in the United States for four years or less. Each grade level is not to exceed 100 students and class sizes are guaranteed to be less than 25 students. According to the school's homepage (2008), the educational philosophy of the school is based on the theory that English language acquisition is best fostered in an academic environment in which students participate in: 1) heterogeneous groups, 2) project-based curriculum, 3) and integrated English development into all content areas. Working in small groups, students learn academic content, art, music, and technology through exciting, rigorous, hands-on projects as they learn their new language.

The Princeton educated principal of South Palm International High was awarded the honor of "South Palm Unified School District Teacher of the Year," and in 2007 she was named "South Palm Educator of the Year." Seven out of twelve teachers and administrators have a Master of Arts degree (several from Ivy League schools such as Stanford and Columbia) and all are at least bilingual. All teachers have lived, taught or studied abroad. This school, albeit not only for refugee students, houses the highest

concentration of refugee students in the district. The 27 refugee students compose a little over 17 percent of the total school population.

#### Statement of the Problem

According to U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (2008) in December, 2007, there were 14,047,300 refugees in need of international protection and assistance in the world of which 80% were women and children. In the same year, the United States of America provided asylum to 147,200 refugees with majority coming from China, Haiti, Cuba, Somalia, Colombia, Russia, Liberia, Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Ukraine, Venezuela, India and others, respectively.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (2005) reports California houses more refugees than any other state in the nation and between 1983-2005, 434,348 refugees arrived in California. When refugee students enter the public school system in California, their data is not systematically recorded. Instead, they are placed in the English learner category along with hundreds of thousands of immigrant students without a systematic way to retrieve refugee student data at the state, district or school levels. Furthermore, according to California Department of Education (2006), of all the English learners who took the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSE) in 2006-2007, 85% did not pass the math section and 90% did not pass the English language arts section. According to the current data, an alarmingly high percentage of refugee students are not graduating from high school.

#### Purpose of Study

Currently, there is a lack of research on the impact of a small school environment on refugee students in a large urban school district. To fill this gap in the research

literature, my study explored how the educational, emotional, and cultural needs of refugee students were being met at South Palm International High School in California and the refugee students' perceptions of high school.

### Research Questions

My research questions were: 1) What are the educational experiences of refugee students at South Palm International High School? 2) What are the emotional/psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School? 3) What are the academic needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School?

### Significance and Limitations of the Study

By observing and engaging in dialogue with refugee students and their teachers, I aimed to find some key strategies which help refugee students heal their wounds and become successful and productive members of society. Through my research, I intended to build inclusion and give voice to refugee students. Furthermore, this research is meant to urge schools, school districts and state education departments to track refugee student records separately from other English learners in order to provide assistance to this marginalized and silenced population.

This study was limited to the responses of refugee students and some of their teachers at South Palm International High School. It did not include all the refugee students and all their teachers at South Palm International High School. In addition, although there may be recurring themes between their experiences and those of other refugee students in the county, state and nationwide, other research may point to different outcomes. This research is also limited because data was gathered for a period of three



months. A longitudinal study would provide more in-depth information about the research questions.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this literature review I focus on the pre-flight, flight and resettlement experiences of refugees. The impact of globalization as well as national and international policies on this population is explored. Furthermore, refugee resettlement experiences in the United States, including interaction with American society, and stressors such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, culture shock, role reversal and intergenerational conflict are explained. Finally, the experiences of refugee children and adolescents in the American education system are discussed.

#### Pre-Flight

Suárez-Orozco (2005) notes the intensification of globalization in the past decade is responsible for the greatest peacetime expansion of the U.S. economy, coinciding with the largest number of immigrants in history. In addition, Suárez-Orozco attributes the forced displacement of millions of people in the developing world to economic or political turmoil caused by globalization. He states “the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed vast economic growth in the rich nations, especially the United States, but roughly 25 percent of the population of the developing world continued to live in desperate poverty, on less than a dollar a day” (p. 3).

Furthermore, the growth in jobs in the developed nations, countries which benefit from globalization, has pulled millions of people into the wealthier centers of the Northern Hemisphere, in some cases causing a “brain drain” and political instability in certain parts of the developing world. Marfleet (2006) maintains the vast majority of forced migrants originate in zones of economic and political crisis located in the

developing world and the crisis of these states is caused by globalization.

Increased instability of local economic structures due to globalization has resulted in mass exodus of people from their countries of origin. Marfleet (2006) states “in 2001 at least 23 countries witnessed civil conflicts in response to policies initiated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)” (p. 54). For example, Marfleet explains the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s was caused by becoming dependant on imported grain, loss of livestock revenue, and debt-service obligations to the IMF and World Bank. Producers of local grains became marginalized after bulk imports of rice and wheat brought a change in consumption patterns. In addition, Saudi Arabia, the main customer of Somalia’s meat export, turned to Western suppliers offering subsidized meat causing debt-service obligations to the IMF and World Bank to reach almost twice the country’s earnings from exports. Eventually, the IMF and World Bank cancelled their loan agreements with Somalia. As a result, 300,000 people died of starvation and almost a quarter of the population of six million became refugees.

### Flight

Displaced in masses, refugees are seen as a threat which could destabilize the place where they seek asylum. As a result, they are often ‘contained’ in camps where they can be monitored and regulated. Marfleet (2006) writes “the greater the insecurity of state authorities, the more they have they proved unwelcoming to displaced people” (p. 200). He documents the experiences of Palestinian refugees who entered Lebanon in 1948 and have been there for more than fifty years. Marfleet declares Palestinians are denied basic rights enjoyed by citizens of the host state and remain stateless.

The Palestinian refugees were concentrated into camps under the control of the police and the intelligence service. Meetings of more than a few were prohibited

and even visits to neighbors could bring police intervention. Residents were subject to general harassment and sometimes to beatings and imprisonment; permits were needed to visit other camps and travel to certain areas of the country was forbidden (p. 203).

Other stateless populations include the ethnic Nepalese from Bhutan, the Meskhetian Turks from Georgia, Vietnamese in Cambodia, ethnic Chinese who fled Vietnam, and the Muslim people of Myanmar.

The conditions in the camps are oppressive and dismal. In many cases the refugees must reside in the camp without permission to leave in order to receive aid. Due to a lack of resources and personnel, regulations are inconsistently enforced, and uprisings and riots become common. Often, refugee camps are dangerously located in hostile areas. According to the Amnesty International Report (2008), On August 21, 2007, after two policemen were killed in Sudan,

hundreds of police, army and Border Intelligence Guards raided Kalma Camp near Nyala, which was sheltering more than 90,000 people. As they entered the camp they beat displaced people with gun butts, looted shelters and arrested some 35 displaced men. The police took the detainees to Nyala, where they were tortured.

The majority of refugees in the world are women and children. As a result, they are especially vulnerable to violence in refugee camps. Women who in many cases have lost the male heads of their households are commonly targeted by either other males in the refugee camps, soldiers of the host country and or relief workers. According to Amnesty International's Report (2008), during 2007 sexual violence remained widespread in various conflicts, with life-long consequences for women and girls. The same report notes in 2007 pregnant woman of eight months was raped in Sudan. In the Ivory Coast dozens of refugee women who had fled Liberia were raped during an operation carried out by security forces in Abidjan aimed at destroying several shanty

towns, where they lived, on the grounds that they sheltered assailants. Many of these women had no access to adequate medical and psychological care or to any justice mechanisms.

Perpetrators of violence against women, including rape, are rarely held accountable. The lack of reparations for women and girls subjected to sexual violence during and after armed conflict was extensively documented in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Moreover, raped women and girls are stigmatized by society and further marginalized. Many women who are victims of rape are afraid to come forward due to cultural stigmas attached to rape. Marfleet (2006) writes "among Vietnamese refugees one strategy adopted by women at risk was to marry to obtain male protection" (p. 209).

Education is not an immediate priority in camps. Often, refugees establish their own make shift schools with limited materials and very little support from the local or international agencies. Sommers (1999), in his research of the education of Burundian refugee children, declares the reason Burundian refugee children do not attend school centers on domestic and economic demands. For example, collecting firewood, water and food, and caring for siblings are among the immediate needs facing refugee families, and the pressure on girls to leave school to contribute to supporting the family is strong.

In addition, Sommers (1999) emphasizes the most frequently cited impediment to children's attendance in Burundian refugee primary schools was that the children did not have appropriate clothes to wear, an indication of the symbolic significance of formal education in Burundian culture. He maintains teachers, members of refugee women's groups, parents, and refugee official claimed there weren't enough clothes or blankets for

the children. Moreover, Sommers declares “this problem was due not only to low supplies, but because regardless of who received the clothes and blankets, refugee men would often end up with them” (p. 11).

For most of the world’s refugees, resettlement in a country of permanent asylum, typically in developed regions such as Western Europe or North America, is a much less likely solution than repatriation or forced “voluntary” return to their countries of origin. Neighboring governments generally grant asylum with the understanding that it would be temporary and that refugees would return to their country of origin once the conditions improve. However, in many cases, such as the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, generations are born and raised in refugee camps, awaiting the possibility of repatriation.

#### Resettlement

Much of the research on refugees in the U.S. is subsumed under immigrant populations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Hones & Cha, 1999; Igoa, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Pryor, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2005). I found no literature that systematically compared differences between groups of immigrants and refugees in schools. As a result, this section of the literature review includes studies on the resettlement experiences of immigrant and refugee populations.

Once they reach the country of permanent asylum, immigrants and refugees endure an integration and adaptation process characterized by socio-political as well as economic, cultural and emotional conflict (Hein, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In recent years, some scholars

have argued that contemporary immigrant and refugee populations in the US face unique challenges and difficulties that set them apart from earlier generations of European newcomers. Hein (2000) suggests, “integration and pluralism is a fundamental tension in immigrant adaptation in the United States” (p. 3). He explains assimilation is refuted because it is an ethnocentric goal that immigrants should become like the natives. In contrast, the ethnic resilience model, promotes adaptation more than assimilation because the focus is on maintenance of the immigrant’s culture and identity. Moreover, Hein asserts dominant groups often exploit immigrants and ethnic minorities, rather than allow them to assimilate. Consequently, many immigrants prefer pluralism and adaptation over assimilation.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) maintain the differences between the new and the old immigrants and refugees to America are manifested in two important dimensions: changes in the racial and ethnic make up of the newcomers themselves and changes in America as a host society. This makes the assimilation model of immigrant and refugee incorporation into the United States less appropriate than it may have been for earlier, more homogeneous groups. New immigrants are not exposed solely to one mainstream population, as they were in the past, and may take divergent assimilation paths. Additionally, some scholars emphasize that since new immigrants from Latin America and Asia are considered racial/ethnic minorities in America, their already established minority status may therefore hinder their full integration into the white middle class.

Portes and Zhou (1993) proposed Segmented Assimilation Theory to address this dynamic. Their theory asserts that since the United States is a stratified and unequal society, immigrants also assimilate to different segments of society. In addition, scholars

(Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) have noted that contemporary newcomers come from a much wider variety of socioeconomic backgrounds than those in previous waves, suggesting that different groups will start out on different steps of the American class system. Furthermore, they argue that the mode of immigrant incorporation is dependent upon interactions between the policies of the host government, prejudices of the receiving country, and the characteristics of the co-ethnic community. These precursors delineate three possible paths of assimilation that newcomers may take. Portes and Zhou (1993) declare the first path is increasing acculturation and integration into the American middle class. The second is acculturation and assimilation into the urban underclass, leading to poverty and downward mobility. The third, “selective acculturation” (p. 54) is rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s culture, solidarity and values.

According to Portes and Zhou (1993), the structural barrier of residential location, the race of the immigrant group, and the lack of mobility ladders make certain immigrant groups particularly susceptible to downward mobility. However, they maintain, if the co-ethnic community is strong enough, its members may create mobility ladders that can override the detrimental effects of a prejudiced societal reception and still maintain a solidified cultural repertoire. Migration literature agrees that the means by which immigrant groups may obtain this form of mobility is through the creation of social capital.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant, (1992) social capital theory offers socio-cultural explanations for why under-represented groups remain excluded from the



educational process. Noguera (2003) affirms social capital, or the benefits individuals gain from associating and participating in certain social networks and organizations, can provide concrete benefits to those who have access to it. Therefore, he maintains “the quality of education children receive is directly related to the ability of parents to generate social capital” (p. 90). Refugee families often lack the social capital, resources or political power to exercise influence over their children’s schools.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) maintain people gain access to social capital through membership in interpersonal networks and social institutions and then convert it into other forms of capital to improve or maintain their position in society. Lin (2001) endorses establishing social ties with members of advantaged groups that can facilitate access to better resources and better outcomes for members of the disadvantaged group. Lin (2001) akin to Noguera, argues that social capital is not spread evenly among all social networks. Since homogenous networks of socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals have few resources, their access to information and influences is limited.

Colon’s (2004) research with Dominicans, who fall into what Portes and Zhou (1993) refer to as assimilation into the underclass, reveals the impact of discrimination and prejudice against foreigners and people of color with limited social capital in U.S. society. He maintains Dominican refugees have to start at the bottom of the social and economic ladder due to hostile government policy. Consequently, despite specialized skills or educational degrees, these refugees are confined to a sense of powerlessness and social isolation.

In many cases, urban refugees are rural people who are likely to have come from bucolic refugee camps and their adjustment period is extremely difficult. In his

description of a newly arrived Cambodian wave of refugees who were settled in an area of New York mostly inhabited by African American and Puerto Ricans, Hein (1995) writes

The newly arrived refugees were disoriented by the spatial dimensions of the building. None had lived in such a large structure in their homelands, and many had little awareness of what “their building” meant, since it took up half a city block and was separated only by a few feet from neighboring buildings...during the day the building was eerily quiet, much at odds with the refugees’ experience in their homeland where neighbors worked and gossiped in a central location (p. 65).

The elderly are described to have been especially saddened and confused because they interpreted their neighbors’ shutting their doors as a sign that they did not wish to be disturbed.

The refugees’ adjustment period is often made more difficult due to hostility and even violence from the natives. Many newcomers, because of race, ethnicity, religion, or cultural differences, encounter discrimination and racism (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Using the *New York Times Index* and a microfiche collection of articles from more than 500 local newspapers, Hein (1995) collected a list of 84 violent incidents against the Indochinese population between 1975 and 1990 in Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, Georgia, Wisconsin, Texas, Kansas, Wyoming, California, Nevada, Arizona, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The violent incidents included protest over the refugees’ arrival, conflict over jobs and social services, destruction of property, harassment, assault and murders.

Through his analysis of the reported violent incidents, Hein (1995) found “whites, rather than minorities, are responsible for destruction of property and protesting the arrival of the refugees, in some cases in conjunction with the local government” (p. 74).

Furthermore, although minorities were dissatisfied with the refugees' presence in their communities, not one report documented an organized effort to halt their settlement. Moreover, Hein reports "whites are disproportionately involved in the most serious conflicts such as assaults and arson and conflicts resulting in death overwhelmingly involved whites rather than minorities" (p. 74).

Portes and Rumbaut (2001), in their longitudinal study of refugees and immigrants from Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Laos, maintain that discrimination was the greatest barrier to adaptation. In addition, in a case study of Hmong refugees in a ninety five percent white city in Wisconsin, Hein (2000) found of the 48 Hmong Americans in the sample, only seven reported that they had never experienced any type of interpersonal discrimination, primarily because they were isolated from contact with Americans. One refugee man stated

When I did not have a driver's license, I walked to stores and school. There were many young Americans who spat on me and said many things to me. They laughed at me. I did not know what to do. I was mad but could not say anything. I tried to avoid them. I felt very bad that no one could do something to these people (p. 424).

Portes and Zhou (1993) endorse that political relations between sending and receiving countries as well as the values and prejudices of the receiving society play a decisive role in the dominant culture's reception of the first and second generation. For example, the first wave of political refugees from Cuba who arrived between 1960s and 1970s received numerous forms of federal assistance: They were upper middle class Cubans who were opposed to Fidel Castro's Communist government. As a result, they were able to make continuous strides towards occupational and economic integration. In

a comparison survey of second generation eighth and ninth grade students in South Florida, Portes and Zhou found roughly three fourths of second generation Cubans endorsed the view that the United States is the best country in the world.

In contrast, Conway and Stafford (1997) note that successive U.S. administrations resisted giving refugee status to poor black Haiti, even during times of extreme political repression in Haiti. In the late 1970s and beginning 1980s thousands of Haitians fled Haiti in boats due to the brutal U.S. backed regime of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Conway and Stafford affirm “the great majority of the refugees were intercepted by the U.S. coast guard and forcibly repatriated to Haiti, with the cooperation of the Haitian government” (p. 249). The Haitians who were successful in entering the U.S. requested political asylum and were routinely denied on the grounds that they were illegal economic immigrants. Consequently, the unfavorable incorporation of Haitians reflects their slow economic progress. Portes and Zhou’s (1993) survey revealed a majority of Haitian second generation children reported having been discriminated against, and more than half expected future discrimination regardless of high academic achievement.

Similarly, Bozorgmehr (1997), in his sociological study of Iranian refugees, found political relations between the U.S. and Iran have had a negative impact on the reception and perception of Iranian refugees in the U.S. He emphasized although the Iranians who fled their homeland in the early 1980s in fear of political and religious persecution by the fundamentalist regime of Ayatollah Khomeini, they were neither legally defined as refugees, nor given government assistance in resettlement in the U.S. Moreover, they themselves are portrayed and viewed as Muslim extremists. Bozorgmehr maintains although Iranians have the same skin color as native whites, their adjusted earnings are

lower than the native whites. In his study, an Iranian man residing in Los Angeles stated

With seven years of professional experience and education I received no responses from any companies to which I was sending my resume. Then I changed my name from Mohammad to Mike in my resume and immediately got four responses, including one from a company that had not responded to Mohammad (p. 100).

On October 21, 2006 Alia Ansari, a Fremont mother of six, was shot in the face as she walked with her three year old daughter to pick up her daughter from school (Matthai & Lee, 2006). According to the news article, Alia, a refugee from Afghanistan, was distinguished by a hijab, the headscarf worn by some devout Muslim women. She had no purse or money on her. A man was acquitted for first degree murder without a motive. The Muslim community in the Bay Area, however, is convinced Alia's murder is a hate crime and she was targeted because she was wearing a hijab.

Recognizing the media's influence on society's perception of Muslims, Mishra (2007) analyzed representations of Muslim men and women in 136 articles published in The New York Times between September 11, 2001, and September 11, 2003. She found stories about Muslim women living in non-Western countries were often stories about political violence where they were represented as victims of violence and Islamic practices. Representations of Muslim women were also marked by a continual obsession with the veil. Muslim women were often portrayed as victims in need of Western liberation, which was sometimes defined narrowly as the exercise of individual choice in the purchase and use of consumer goods such as nail polish, lipsticks and high-heeled shoes. Articles on Muslim men were often about Islamic resurgence, terrorism and illegal immigration with details about "resumes of holy warriors" and "manuals of killing" (p.1).

In addition to becoming targets of racism in the U.S., many refugee families also

undergo a large number of immediate stressors which can result in a difficult transition period. Unlike immigrants, refugees cannot look back at their experience, taking comfort in the fact that they made choices to arrive at their current conditions. Hein (1995) discusses a Vietnamese man's perspective about his future two months after being resettled in the U.S.

I don't like the communists, but I like Vietnam. I am a refugee, so I like to go back when my country is free. I can't live here. I can't speak the language, and I don't know anyone in this building. I will live here a short time and then I will go back to my country to be with my family...my mother, my uncle (p. 65).

Refugees also often feel a deep sense of loss. Bendorz and Caldwell (2004) in their assessment of the experiences of Laotian refugees in the U.S., highlight loss of status and economic class as the most significant issue for the first wave of adult Laotians. They note, "Certification and licenses are not reciprocal and in order for the Lao to work in their professions, they would have to start all over again" (p. 105).

For many refugees, mourning such tremendous loss is a lifetime ordeal. Ainslie (2001) describes this process as "cultural mourning" through which "the individual must come to terms with the loss of family and friends on the one hand and cultural forms that have given the immigrant's native world a distinct and highly personal character on the other hand" (p. 208). Eisenbruch (1988) found that not only personal bereavement but also cultural bereavement is an important factor in a refugee child's adjustment. He argued that rapid acculturation can negatively affect children's ability to complete their grieving process and claim their cultural identity.

Moreover, the parents' individual responses after resettlement have an effect on their children's stress responses. In a cross sectional interview of 329 Chinese and Southeast Asian adolescents, Spencer and Le (2006) explored the intergenerational

effects of trauma and examined independent effects of parents' refugee camp experience and immigration stress on serious family violence among youth. The results of their study suggest that the refugee process, as experienced second-hand through the children of refugees, has a strong effect on externally oriented violence (serious violence) and on family/partner violence. In the Vietnamese group, parents' refugee experiences appeared to inhibit their ability to engage in effective day-to-day relationships and communication, which Spencer and Le suggest, may lead their children to commit serious violence.

Coll and Magnuson (2001) declare migration frequently requires a family to adopt new patterns of interaction and coping that may conflict with those of the homeland. Moreover, because structure and roles of the family are confounded by the transition into the new culture, children and their parents face generation conflicts. They note "most children and their parents face generation conflicts, simply because the parents and the children are socialized into different worlds in a temporal sense" (p. 116). In analyzing data on Haitian refugees from their longitudinal Study, Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, Teed, and Labissiere (2001) contended that intergenerational conflict increases when rejection by the host society is high, as in the case of Haitians.

Furthermore, since the children usually become fluent in the new language faster than their parents, generational and status boundaries are crossed when they serve as linguistic interpreters for their parents. Coll and Magnuson (2001) suggest "this change has the potential to cause significant stress for families that are accustomed to generational boundaries and parental authority and can cause distress for the child, making him feel like a yo-yo" (p. 116). Parents can come to resent their dependence on their children, while children can feel chronic stress from status inconsistency to behave

as a child and an adult at the same time.

The sense and vulnerability of being caught in the middle of two different nationalities, cultures, religions, races and languages at school are common experiences among refugee students. According to Olsen (1997) students feel intense pressure from their peer groups when choosing to side with one group or the other. Nevertheless, changing who they are is viewed as a requirement for membership in the dominant group. Igoa (1995) captured refugee students' struggle to negotiate between two worlds in school. She describes her conversation with Dung, a Vietnamese refugee student about cultural conflict

I didn't know which way to act- the way I was raised or the way everybody else was acting. It was like a mixture of the two, and I didn't know what to do. One minute I'm this, and another minute I'm that. I couldn't pull it together...that's why I was so insecure (p. 99).

Role reversal is also experienced between the male and female heads of households. In some families, the mother may have replaced the father as head of the household. The father, who may not have been able to get a job which fits his status in the old country, may remain unemployed. In this way, the father's position as head of the household may be threatened by the mother who may be the only breadwinner. In some cases, the father may resort to violent means to assert his authority and affirm his control.

In summary, refugees' resettlement process is complex and multidimensional. It often includes simultaneous grappling with political, social, economic, cultural and emotional conflict.

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

The sense of loss, culture clash and role reversal may be accompanied by a legacy of trauma including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post Traumatic Stress



Disorder is a psychiatric disorder that occurs following the experience or witnessing of lifelong threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, or violent personal assaults. This disorder can occur in men, women and children in western and non-western cultures and throughout the socioeconomic spectrum. A diagnosis of PTSD means that an individual experienced an event that involved a threat to one's own or another life and that this person acted with intense fear, helplessness and horror.

According to Kaplan (2002), PTSD has different age and gender specific features and is defined by four variables:

(1) exposure by personal experience or by witnessing an event which threatened or caused death and severe injury to self or others; (2) a consistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event through flashbacks, nightmares or episodes of intense distress to events of any similarity to the original trauma; (3) persistent avoidance of all stimuli related to the original event to include an avoidance of thoughts, feelings, conversations, or other situations that have similarity to the trauma, a detachment from others, and a numbing of affect; and (4) ongoing symptoms of increased arousal as a result of the trauma to include sleep difficulties, irritability, concentration difficulties, hyper-vigilance, and an exaggerated startle response (<http://www.dcmsonline.org/jax-medicine/2002journals/augsept2002/PTSD.htm>)

Furthermore, Masser (1992) asserts having no voice in lifelong decisions to leave their homeland may lead to learned helplessness in children. In a study of PTSD in Central American refugee children, Masser highlights the difference between the impact of trauma on children and adults. She concludes when trauma occurs in an adult's life, it is assumed that a previous steady state was disrupted by the trauma, causing a decline in functioning that may or may not be temporary. For children, Masser writes, the process differs because children are in a state of continual change and the trauma does not interrupt, but interferes with the acquisition of new developmental skills.

In his analysis of Bosnian victims of PTSD, Roysircar (2004) mentions that

difficulties are exacerbated when refugees are displaced from their homeland and placed in opposing cultural setting, such as the United States where the dominant culture clashes with native cultures. He writes about Bosnian adolescents' attempts in Massachusetts to assimilate into the dominant culture's social peer groups. He notes their American peers wanted nothing to do with the war experience in Bosnia. Consequently, Bosnian students distanced themselves from their family, which cause significant shifts in the tight knit Bosnian family.

Masser (1992) notes a multitude of symptoms including nightmares, angry outbursts, depression, nervousness, insomnia, loss of appetite and tearfulness amongst her Central American subjects, minors three to eighteen years old, who had immigrated to the United States due to devastating conditions in their homelands. Kaplan (2002), however, asserts that symptoms of PTSD vary widely depending on the age of the child. He contends very young children may appear to have few symptoms, yet they may experience more anxiety and depressive disorders. Elementary age children may have memory deficits and poor recall of original trauma. And adolescents may incorporate events of the trauma in their daily lives.

Roysircar (2004) notes emotions of sadness and anger as well as aggressive outbursts, loss of consciousness, hostility, lack of belonging and reoccurring nightmares in his case study of a young Bosnian boy named Stephen suffering from PTSD. He reports that "nearly 80% of Stephen's classmates were killed in bombings, gunfire, and sniper shots as they walked to and from school. He saw his friends being killed" (p. 2). As a result, Stephen developed a deep hatred for Muslims making comments like "the Middle East should be wiped off the face of the earth" (p. 3).

Similarly, Mehraby's (2000) case study of Omar, a nine year old Afghan refugee, who at the age of three had discovered his own father's strangled corpse, reveals deeply etched traces of hatred and revenge. In one of the sessions, Omar chose to make a play dough gun and said, "bad people can be killed by a gun" (p. 9). This reflected his desire to avenge the murder of his father. When playing animal games, Omar always chose to take the role of the strong animals such as tigers and lions and killed the rest of the animals in order to appear as the hero of the game. Consequently, he revealed his desire to be the strong one rather than the victim.

However, since victims of PTSD have suffered from a multitude of traumatic experiences and under different cultural, social, and political settings, there is not a homogenous recognizable pattern of behavior amongst them. According to Blackwell (2000) refugees come from a wide range of cultures, have had varied experiences, and present their needs and difficulties in a variety of ways. For example, Masser (1992) stresses that "Central American children who have suffered the effects of war are distinct from other groups" (p. 5). Blackwell (2000) emphasizes the importance of not categorizing everyone since some victims may be "students who appear to manage the academic side of school quite well, but remain unhappy" (p. 5).

In a cross sectional study of 76 Khmer refugee adolescents living in violence-ridden inner cities in western United States, Berthold (1999) found exposure to community violence in the U.S. is strongly associated with PTSD. According to Berthold, "the number of violent events that this population of foreign born Khmer adolescents was exposed to in the United States, predicted their self-perceived level of functioning PTSD symptoms" (p. 466). Berthold suggests despite the fact that these

adolescents were exposed to violent events in Cambodia and in refugee camps, the number of violent events that they encounter in their neighborhoods in the United States may be having a greater impact on their level of well being.

### Refugee Students in the American Education System

Resettled refugee families often struggling with loss, poverty, racism, acculturation, role reversal and PTSD enroll their children in their neighborhood inner city public schools. Noguera (2003) maintains “It is widely recognized that many urban public schools are places that should be avoided because they are dangerous, chaotic and potentially dangerous to those who go there” (p. 15). Yet, he documented the words of Salvadoran refugees in inner city Los Angeles: “We are poor without power or rights. At least our children have an education. Yes, there are problems in our schools, but we have hope that the future for our children will be better” (p. 5). Although these parents raise their children in crime and drug infested neighborhoods, they are hopeful public schools will provide an avenue of success for their children.

Gebhard (2003) examined methods of second language instruction chosen by three schools in California and criticized the lack of understanding of methodology and professional development in two of the schools. In one school, teachers expected students to learn silently, through reading and writing. In another school, the approach was nearly the reverse, with teachers withholding substantial subject content until children developed oral language abilities through the use of games and songs.

Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990) conducted a two-year qualitative study of Hmong students attending "La Playa" Elementary School, which served a university community in Southern California. The researchers compiled systematic observations,

interviews, tape recordings, and ethnographic analysis over 18 months. They discovered that half of the 591 children enrolled at the school spoke a first language other than English. Of the 25 languages represented, Spanish was the primary minority language for 101 students; Hmong, for 77 students. However, no Southeast Asian adults held jobs at the school, and the aides and counselors were neither bilingual nor had any multicultural training. Families reported that there were no translators at parent-teacher conferences.

Furthermore, Trueba, et al. (1990) found that many teachers and administrators perceived the immigrant and refugee students as having low intelligence and learning disabilities. The researchers' analysis of school documents reveal that school personnel sometimes misdiagnosed students based on faulty information. Teachers in the school exhibited prejudice by believing that the Indochinese students were inferior in intelligence and culture to native born students, rather than acknowledging that they had a different set of values which led to different cognitive styles. In their analysis of Hmong children who were labeled most needy learning disabled, Trueba and colleagues found that one of the major criteria for the label was the children's inability to communicate well in English: The school operated under an "English-only" policy.

Trueba et al. (1990) observed that the children moved between deep depression and isolation, on the one hand, and panic, on the other. They report that the students experienced trauma with psychological side effects because of teacher expectations that they perform complex skills and demonstrate understanding of cultural knowledge in a language still foreign to them. Children would refer to themselves as "dumb," and they talked about killing themselves. In addition, the researchers found that the children came to believe they were disabled, and they decreased or even stopped their attempts to learn,

even though testing of their skills had been done in English and some students performed above average in subjects that were not English-intensive, such as mathematics.

Lee's (2002) examination of Hmong refugees in a Wisconsin high school also expound that mainstream teachers felt no responsibility for the Hmong students, allocating that duty to ESL teachers. Lee found that some educators at the school determined the Hmong to be not only educationally different but deficient and inferior to mainstream students. They described their culture as preliterate, clannish, and rural, and they described the practice of early marriage of girls as backwards. In addition, some students also characterized Hmong students as culturally deficient. Hmong students tried to counter this unwelcoming posture by claiming their status as Americans and by separating themselves from more recent Hmong arrivals. Lee observed Hmong students quickly learned that Whites were at the top of the social and academic hierarchy. He concludes that schools need to address the notion of what it is to be an American and must challenge the notion that Whiteness is the means to being American.

In her book about immigrant students in public schools, Olsen (1997) studied the dynamics between different racial and ethnic groups at an inner city high school in the Bay Area in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Americanization of immigrants. According to Olsen,

students in inner city schools know academic achievement is not just a product of intelligence, self perception and effort: There is an institutional reality that provides groups of students with different resources, different encouragement, and a different curriculum (p. 80).

She quotes Nadira, a recent refugee from Afghanistan who defines being American.

The rest are not real Americans. But the immigrants most of us wish to be American and try. And they become more and more like Americans. And they want to hang out with kids who are more American. But you can never really get

there. We can speak English; we can wear the clothes. But we aren't the right religion; we aren't the same. You can't really get there" (p. 43).

Olsen observed amongst newcomer students she interviewed that all agree that to be American is to be English speaking, white skinned and Christian. Furthermore, American students' choice not to interact with newcomers reinforced the newcomer students' sense that they are marked as outsiders and American is a category that does not include them.

Moreover, refugee students may also face anger from the "American" students in inner city schools because they strive to succeed in school. Olsen (1997) writes "the anger is partially about immigrant groups who achieve success in the school and part of their anger is aimed at newcomers for reinforcing the ideology that academic achievement is a product of motivation and effort" (p. 80). She maintains the newcomer students' attitude towards school eventually parallels teachers' views which blame students for academic failure. Since newcomer students feel the immense resentment against them, they come to understand that the belief in success through hard work stands in the way of being accepted by their American peers.

### Summary

The factors that lead people to leave their homes, communities, and lands in search of safety are complex. Repression, social violence, armed conflict, poverty globalization and forced displacement co-exist and reinforce each other. The immediate cause of flight is almost always the danger of human rights abuse. Refugees bear numerous and often traumatic experiences associated with the decision to emigrate, the journey itself, and resettlement in a host country.

Furthermore, in the host country, the dominant culture imposes its values upon the

refugees in order to assimilate them as fast as possible. Many newcomers, because of race, ethnicity, religion, or cultural differences, encounter discrimination and racism (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2005). As a result, refugee families suffer from cultural conflicts including culture clash and role reversal (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 2000). In addition, a lack of formal education and proficiency in the host country's language also puts refugees at an economic disadvantage. Portes and Zhou (1993) explained that refugees arriving since the late 1970s are subjected to fragmented assimilation and are less likely to blend into white society than their predecessors because of their racial and ethnic origins. Noguera (2003) notes refugees are amongst the inhabitants of poor urban areas with little or no social capital. Consequently, their children are forced to attend schools that often can not provide the appropriate language and emotional services they need.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Restatement of the Purpose and Overview

The purpose of my study was to explore how the educational, emotional, and cultural needs of refugee students were being met at International High School in the United States through the perception of refugee students themselves and their teachers. This part includes a description of the methodology and research design used in this study as well as a rationale for the selection of the design. In addition, the setting, population and sample selection process are described. This chapter also includes a description of the data collection process and analysis.

#### Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design and one-on-one interviews, as defined by Patton (2001) Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Creswell (2005) were used to explore the research questions. The open ended nature of this research design allowed the participants to fully explain their experiences and thoughts about South Palm International High School in their own words. One-on-one interviews were comprised of 16 questions to ten students and 12 questions to two teachers. Each interview lasted no more than one hour.

#### Research Setting

South Palm International High School (SPIHS) is located in the middle class Temple neighborhood of South Palm. It opened its doors in August of 2007 with an initial class of 100 9th grade students, all English language learners. Each year, OIHS will enroll another 100 ninth graders until it is a full 9-12 high school serving about 400 students. Collectively the students speak 23 different languages and come from all parts

of the globe: China, Mongolia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, Bhutan, Ghana, Gabon, Congo, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Yemen, Uzbekistan, Russia, Ukraine, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. According to California Department of Education (2008) in the 2007-2008 school year there were 93 students enrolled at the school. Of those, 53.8 % were Latino, 15.1 % Asian and 7.5 % African. The predominant languages spoken were 45.9% Spanish, 16.3% Cantonese, 4% Arabic and 4% Russian. Other languages spoken by students include Vietnamese, Turkish, Thai, and Burmese.

Each year for the next three years, 100 students will be added to the student body until SPIHS reaches capacity at 400 students. As the school grows, the faculty will separate into teams of four or five teachers that work with the same group of 100 students and stay with them for two years. To be eligible for enrollment at SPIHS, students must have been in the US for four years or less. The mission of the school is for students to master the reading, writing, and speaking of English in preparation for college.

The school's physical structure is surrounded by symbols of community and harmony. Student created multilingual "Welcome" posters adorn the entrance to the school. Walking through the well manicured quad, one can see student and teacher created murals that read, "Respect each other," in various languages depicting scenes from Asian, Latino, African, and American cultures.

Currently, the ninth and tenth graders are combined in mixed classes taught by a team of teachers using a two-year curriculum allowing teachers to gain a greater understanding of individual students' needs and progress over time. The teachers meet bi-weekly to present current and upcoming projects and obtain feedback from their

colleagues in order to improve instruction. They also meet every other week to focus on case management and the discussion of individual students' difficulties and needs.

SPIHS has been granted a waiver from using the standard SPUSD benchmark assessments in favor of using the math, literacy, and English writing assessments developed by International Schools. As a result, SPIHS staff have selected and created assessment systems that teachers find useful, relevant and appropriate. However, the students are also required to take the state standardized exams such as the California English Language Development Tests, the California High School Exit Exam and the California Standards Tests.

In addition to curricular and assessment flexibility, there is also a great deal of collaboration with parents and the surrounding community. SPIHS' prosperous Temple neighborhood provides the school with numerous local elementary school parents, former teachers, retired librarians, and community members who often come to the school to volunteer. Last year students from the nearby university provided after-school tutoring and homework help four days a week. The principal at SPIHS applied and obtained a grant making after school tutoring available to all students. Tutoring is provided by a refugee resettlement organization which also offers in-home tutoring to refugee students.

South Palm International High School is the first International High School branch outside of New York. Internationals Network for Public Schools (Internationals) is a network of public high schools whose mission is to provide quality education for recently arrived immigrant students by providing rigorous education in small, public high schools. The first International High School was founded in 1985 in Queens, New York. International schools are called International High Schools to reflect the kaleidoscopic

backgrounds of the students. According to New America Media (February, 2008) in New York the Internationals have graduated 65 percent of their students in four years, compared to 33 percent for the English Language learners in regular schools and over 90 percent of their graduates have gone on to higher education.

### Population and Sample

All twelve participants (two staff members and ten refugee students) in this study were selected from South Palm International High School. The school's refugee population included students from Liberia, Burma, Bhutan, and Meskhetian Turks. I selected a cross-section of mixed gender subjects. As an English Learner Network Coach for South Palm Unified School District, I had access to this site and the teachers. The ten refugee students for my study were chosen according to teacher recommendation, students' communicative skills in English as well as their willingness to discuss their experiences.

All teachers at South Palm International High School, in addition to being licensed and certified in appropriate subject areas by the State of California, are required to demonstrate respect for immigrant rights and a willingness to act as an advocate. Furthermore, experience in living, working or studying abroad as well as proficiency in a language other than English is desired. Both teachers I selected for this study are native speakers of another language, bilingual, experienced and attended Ivy League universities. One teacher was a refugee student herself. I chose to observe Ms. Tran's class because I wanted to see how elective content such as art is taught to refugee students. I observed Ms. Shweta's class to look for ways math and technology are taught to refugee students.

Ms. Tran is of Vietnamese origin and is fluent in Vietnamese. She previously taught at the High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology in Brooklyn, where she developed interdisciplinary arts courses, including Comics as Oral History, Global Art, and Design. She studied both Art and Legal Studies at UC Berkeley, and later completed an MFA in Sculpture at Bard College and a Masters in Art Education at New York University, then became certified to teach Social Studies and Art in New York and California. She is currently writing and drawing a graphic novel about the civil war in Vietnam and her family's immigration to the United States in the late 70s.

Ms. Shweta is of Indian origin. She most recently worked for the Boston Public Schools as a technology support specialist in Roxbury and Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts. While in Boston, she managed a nationally-recognized math and technology integration project and co-authored the district's long-term technology plan, LINC III. After leaving Boston, she decided to take the long way back home to the Bay Area by traveling east through Europe, South Africa, and Asia until she landed in California. Ms. Shweta has a BS in Business Administration and a minor in Religious Studies from UC Berkeley and a Masters in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

#### Data Collection

This study included five one hour observations of two classes (art and math) and twelve one hour interviews (one interview with each teacher and ten refugee students). The main purpose of the interviews was to gain further insight in the experiences and needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School. I observed the art class and math class through the months of October through January, 2008. I typed all

the field notes.

During the observations I recorded the academic experiences, as well as emotional and educational needs of refugee students. All three research questions were utilized in forming the observation tool. I also recorded my reactions to the data in a journal. In addition, I noted the refugee students' responses and engagement with the lessons. Class handouts, student work samples and informational resources were collected to provide additional insight about the services available to refugee students at South Palm International High School.

Twelve audio-taped interviews with teachers and students were conducted and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes. The interview transcriptions included the interview questions, as well as who was interviewed where, and for how long to ensure accuracy of the captured data. The hard copy of transcriptions was available to the participants upon request. Each interview question addressed a specific research question. In all of the interviews I used at least one example from my own experiences of being a refugee in order to build safety and trust with participants.

The chart below illustrates how my research questions were addressed in my interview questions to students as well as teachers.

Research Questions	Student Interview Questions	Teacher Interview Questions
1. What are the educational experiences of refugee students at South Palm International High School?	1. Tell me about your education before coming to America. <i>Probe: Why did your family come to the U.S.? How? Did you go to school? How often? Describe your school?</i> 2. What were some of the challenges? Similarities?	1. What do you know about the refugee students in your classes? 2. What do you know about your refugee students' background in education? <i>Probe: Can you give some specific examples?</i> 3. Describe a project/assignment that you found to be very engaging for refugee students.

	<p>3. How do you feel about your school now?</p> <p>4. Talk about some of the activities or projects you've done at this school that you really liked...why?</p> <p>5. Tell me about some of the things you do during lunch or after school at school?</p> <p>6. What do you like/dislike about your school?</p>	<p><i>Probe: Explain the process for developing the ____ lesson.</i></p> <p>4. What have you found to be important to do when teaching refugee students?</p> <p>5. What have you noticed about the integration of refugee students' languages and cultural backgrounds at school?</p> <p><i>Probe: Can you give some examples</i></p>
<p>2. What are the emotional/psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School?</p>	<p>7. How do you feel at school?</p> <p><i>Probe: Do you feel safe here?</i></p> <p>8. What do you think about at school?</p> <p>9. How do you see yourself in relation to everybody else?</p> <p><i>Probe:</i></p> <p><i>Do you think other students are friendly?</i></p> <p><i>How would other students describe you? How would teachers describe you?</i></p> <p>10. Do you feel like you belong in the group here?</p> <p><i>Probe: Do you have friends?</i></p> <p>11. Who do you go to (in school) if you feel upset, sad or anxious at school?</p> <p>12. What do you think about the teachers at this school?</p> <p><i>Probe: What do you want your teachers and other students to know about how you feel?</i></p>	<p>6. How are refugee students' emotional and psychological needs the same or different as other students?</p> <p>7. To what extent are teachers prepared to respond to refugee students' emotional and psychological needs?</p> <p><i>Probe:</i></p> <p><i>Can you give some examples?</i></p> <p>8. What is in place to support the emotional and psychological needs of refugee students?</p> <p><i>Probe: Is there a counselor on site that works with refugee students? How often? Which students?</i></p>
<p>3. What are the academic needs of students at South Palm International High School?</p>	<p>13. What do you need to succeed academically at school?</p> <p>14. What do you expect the school to provide you?</p> <p>15. To what extent do you feel this school gives you that?</p> <p><i>Probe: How are your needs being met?</i></p>	<p>9. What do you consider to be the most immediate academic needs of refugee students?</p> <p>10. How are the academic needs of refugee students the same/different than those of other students?</p> <p>11. How do you meet the academic needs of refugee students in your classes?</p>

	<p>16. Who do you go to when you are having a hard time understanding or completing an assignment?</p> <p><i>Probe : How often? Is that enough?</i></p>	<p><i>Probe: Can you give some examples? What strategies do you incorporate when preparing your lessons?</i></p> <p>12. What intervention strategies are in place for refugee students?</p> <p><i>Probe: Especially students who have missed school, never had formal education etc.?</i></p>
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### Data Analysis

Data analysis is dynamic in that it includes continual reflection about data as obtained. Asking general questions while reflecting on the information supplied by the participants is crucial in gaining a deep understanding of the data. I transcribed all my interviews after conducting them. Next, I carefully read the transcripts, noted reoccurring themes, and color coded them according to the following: loss, culture shock, education in native country and camp, community, and hope. After coding the themes, I found they coincided with those already identified in the literature.

I obtained permission from University of San Francisco's IRBHS committee prior to conducting the interviews for this study and discussed the problem and the purpose statement of this study with the participants. All the participants were given an oral explanation as well as a copy of the consent form to read and sign. I personally met with eight out of ten student participants' parents and explained my research as well as the purpose for conducting it prior to obtaining their permission. Participants were asked for permission to record their conversations while being interviewed by the researcher. The interviews were conducted strictly on a volunteer basis. I used pseudonyms for all participants in order to maintain their anonymity.



## CHAPTER IV

### PROFILES

This chapter includes detailed profiles of the students' homelands and the students in order to contextualize their experiences prior to arrival in the United States. It is my hope that readers will develop a more thorough understanding of each student through this in depth information about the sociopolitical situation in their countries before, during and after war.

#### Burma

Ethnic minorities live in the mountainous regions of Burma bordering Bangladesh, China, India, Laos, and Thailand making up about a third of Burma's population of an estimated forty seven million people (CIA Factbook, 2009). According to Human Rights Watch (2007), in the past six decades, the Burmese army, or Tatmadaw, has carried out numerous and widespread executions, looting, torture, rape and other sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, forced labor, and recruitment of child soldiers. It has also been responsible for the displacement and demolition of entire villages in order to crush the armed ethnic minority groups that are seeking greater autonomy from the dominant ethnic Burman majority. Consequently, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a state of almost perpetual conflict and militarization.

The appalling plight of the country's ethnic minorities has often been overshadowed by the government's concurrent confrontation with the pro-democracy movement led by ethnic Burmans. Human Rights Watch (2007) reports that in 1988, to protest a quarter-century of one-party military rule, hundreds of thousands of students and other demonstrators took to the streets across Burma, calling for democracy and the

rule of law. In response, the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) brutally crushed the movement, killing thousands of civilians and causing the flight of thousands more from central Myanmar to Thailand, India and Bangladesh.

Two years later, the SLORC held elections in May 1990 in reaction to the persistent protests. Human Rights Watch (2005) notes the highly popular Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been placed under house arrest in 1989, and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won 82 percent of the seats. However, the generals refused to allow the NLD and its allies to form a government, instead imprisoning several hundred more political opponents. Despite severe restrictions on freedom of speech, association, and assembly, many individuals and groups continue to speak out and work for democracy and development at both the community and national levels in Burma.

According to Amnesty USA (2009), since 1988, when the military reasserted power after suppressing a widespread pro-democracy movement, the SLORC has allowed its forces to commit widespread human rights violations against civilians during operations against the country's ethnic minorities and armed opposition groups. Amnesty USA (2005) also maintains ethnic minority civilians living in counter-insurgency areas are used as forced labor for the army. The most difficult form of forced labor is portering whereby the Tatmadaw compels civilians to carry heavy loads for several days or weeks at a time. The continuing practice of forced labor has violated basic human rights under international law by depriving thousands of people of the right to work, the right to free choice of employment, and the right to earn an adequate standard of living.

Women and children are also routinely subjected to forced labor and portering at the hands of the Tatmadaw. Since parents normally spend most of their time working

long hours to earn a living for their families, their children have become prey to forced labor recruiters. Amnesty International (2005) documents that a 17-year-old Mon girl from a counter-insurgency area in Yebyu township, Tanintharyi Division admitted that she had been forced to work on building a road since the age of five. The same report documents the acknowledgment a 14-year-old Mon girl from Ye Pyu township who escaped after being forced to work on the Ye-Dawei railway with many other children, some as young as 12 years old.

In addition, an extensive investigation by Human Rights Watch (2002) found that up to 20 percent of Burma's soldiers were boys as young as 11 years old. The report noted that recruiters for the Burmese army frequently use deception, threats, intimidation and violence to enlist children in order to fulfill quotas issued by the government. Former child soldiers were interviewed and their testimonies documented routine beatings during their military training and brutal punishments if they tried to escape. Eleven year old Than Aung who was recruited into the army at age fourteen stated

When we arrived [at the recruit holding center] the soldiers asked us, "Would you like to join the army or would you like to go home?" Many of us said we'd like to go home. Then they took the thirty or forty of us who'd said that, stripped us naked, put us in the lockup and gave us just a tiny bit of rice. . . . There were about sixty of us in a room the same size as this one [four to five meters square] . . . I don't think any were over eighteen. There were ten children who were just thirteen years old. The youngest was my friend who was eleven. He often cried because he didn't get enough food, and then he was beaten by the guards. I also cried often because I didn't want to join the army. I was beaten twice a day for crying. . . . We couldn't sleep. There were also rats and ants in the room. . . . For a toilet they'd dug a hole in the ground and it had a wooden cover over it. . . . There was a terrible smell. . . . Some of my friends were crying. . . . Two or three boys got sick and died (p. 4).

Amnesty U.S.A. (2005) has also documented human rights abuses in Burma by ethnic minority-based armed opposition groups, including arbitrary detention, torture, and

unlawful killings. Armed opposition groups are almost entirely dependent on local villagers for rice and other supplies, which civilians routinely provide to them, reportedly because of their shared ethnicity. This can result in civilians being deprived of sufficient food, or being punished by the Tatmadaw if they believe villagers are voluntarily giving rice to members of armed groups.

In a report by Amnesty U.S.A. (2005), ethnic Karen described how their friends and relatives were killed by the army during its counter-insurgency operations against the Karen National Union (KNU), the largest ethnic armed opposition group. A Karen Buddhist farmer witnessed the killing of his neighbor, Way Myat Paw:

The army asked Way Myat Paw: 'Are you a KNU soldier?' The other villagers said 'No, he's a civilian, not KNU'. But then the soldiers shot him, one bullet in the back... his body was left there... He was a nice person, a little bit fat, smiled a lot, a happy kind of lad (p. 12).

Human Rights Watch (2007) also interviewed other Burmese refugees who suffered grave loss at the hands of the Tatmadaw soldiers who suspected them to be supporters of the opposition groups. A farmer conveyed

I will never forget our suffering at Ler Kaw village. When the soldiers shot my thirteen-year-old daughter, her intestines came out. Her father and I tried to save her, and escape. She was in agony, and screaming, but we couldn't do anything to ease her pain. She died after an hour. We haven't done anything against the government. All we had in our hands when their troops attacked was our paddy, and harvesting tools. If the soldiers had called us, we would have gone to talk with them. They didn't have to shoot (p. 14).

In addition, Amnesty U.S.A.'s report (2005) revealed that women were raped and forced to serve and entertain government troops against their will. A refugee described how Mi Aul, aged 15, and Mi She, aged 16 did not survive:

They had been raped continually for six nights, by two or three men each night, including the soldiers' commander... After their release, the two girls didn't sleep, didn't eat and eventually just died (p. 6)

Due to such atrocities, thousands of members of ethnic minorities have fled to Thailand or other areas of Burma to avoid human rights violations. Clashes between the government and opposition groups have also forced hundreds of people to leave their homes. The number of the internally displaced people in Burma is daunting. Human Rights Watch (2007) estimates suggest that as of late 2004, as many as 650,000 people were internally displaced in eastern Burma alone. The same report documents at least 240 villages were also destroyed, relocated, or abandoned. Moreover, since 2002, approximately 100,000 people have been displaced from Karen areas.

In addition to the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, according to Human Rights Watch (2007), approximately two million Burmese live in Thailand: of those roughly 145,000 are refugees from Mon, Karen, and Karenni ethnic minorities living in 10 sprawling camps along the border. Amnesty USA (2007) affirms refugees from Burma began to enter Thailand in 1984, where non-governmental organizations were permitted by the authorities to provide assistance to the camps. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has never been officially permitted by the Thai government to establish a presence on the border in order to exercise its protection mandate.

The legal status of refugees in Thailand is uncertain because Thailand has not signed and therefore is not a party to the UN Refugee Convention. According to a report by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (2006), all refugees who are present in the country without authorization are branded as illegal immigrants and are at risk of deportation to their country of origin at any time. In practice Thailand has in the past tolerated the presence of large numbers of Burmese refugees. However, there are

recent indications that its policy may be changing.

Too often Burmese refugees are abused or forcibly returned home when they seek protection. According to Amnesty U.S.A. (2005), from 1984 to the mid-1990s, the Thai authorities allowed Karen refugees fleeing Burma to stay in camps along Thailand's western border. Since early 1995, however, Karen refugees have increasingly found that they have no place to hide. The same report indicates that in January 1995, 10,000 Karen civilians fled into Thailand after the Burmese army took control of their territory. The KNU rebels followed the terrified people to the camps across the Thai border. This caused the Burmese soldiers to attack the camps, abducting and killing several refugees, and burning thousands of refugee homes. The Thai authorities on the border responded by moving some of the camps further inside Thailand and by consolidating several smaller camps into larger ones. However, the Karen rebels have continued their cross-border assaults and attempts to force the estimated 100,000 Karen refugees to return to Karen State in Burma.

#### Refugee Camp Life for Burmese Refugees in Thailand

According to a UNHCR report (2006), refugees in the camps, dependent on subsistence-level humanitarian assistance, lead lives of poverty, frustration and unrealized potential. In addition, they face grave danger including high rates of rape (frequently of minors), high levels of domestic violence, recruitment of child soldiers, detention and deportation: In some camps there have been summary executions. The report confirms camp based justice mechanisms currently did not systematically work for the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators.

The UNHCR report (2006) also documented that many of the refugee camps were

overcrowded. Food rations were insufficient to meet dietary needs and refugees also faced a shortage of many essential non-food items. Within the camps existed a high level of chronic malnutrition, a lack of diversity in the diet over a long period, poor child feeding practices, and the inability of refugees to purchase additional food items. Refugees often went outside the camps to forage for food where they risked being arrested and deported if caught by the Thai authorities.

UNHCR (2006) confirmed health services were unable to meet the needs of refugees with mental and or psychological problems, also facing a need for more extensive HIV/AIDS counseling for sufferers and their communities to encourage treatment and prevent social stigmatization. Improvements to sanitation including waste disposal was highlighted as an urgent need in order to stem the spread of diseases.

UNHCR (2006) found despite a relatively high enrolment rate of primary school children, many did not complete their final exams. Moreover, school drop out rates increased as children moved into secondary school. School facilities required repairs and additional school supplies. The absence of a common curriculum and trained teachers lead to different qualities of education.

### Bee

Fifteen year-old Bee was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. She lives with her father, mother, grandmother, older and younger brother in a one bedroom apartment in the Cherryvale neighborhood of South Palm. Bee, her father, and brother left Thailand for the U.S. a year and a half ago, and her mother and grandmother arrived six months later. Bee lived with her grandmother in Thailand as both her parents worked outside of the refugee camp in order to afford their living expenses and school fees.

During my interview with Bee, she revealed having lived in stark poverty in the refugee camp in Thailand where she was born. She recalled how basic necessities such as drinking water, food, fuel for cooking and secure shelter were unavailable at times.

In summer time it was hard to get water. We had to wake up early and go to the cave in the pipe and get the water. Sometimes the well doesn't work, sometimes it was broke. Sometime when the wind was hard, the leaves broke in the house and there was no wall. Sometimes the water is so bad when it was rainy the water was muddy and dirty. Some people drink that. We did too. We tried to boil it. A lot of people get a disease very easy because of the mosquito and the water. It spread and a lot of people get sick. People's eyes get red. Before I come here, I also got that disease. When I came here I realize my house there was dirty. Sometimes when it rain bamboo is wet and sometimes it was night time and when it rains it leaks on your blanket. It happened to me too. I was sleeping and it was leaking on my blanket. I feel something wet and wake up. Each 15 days, every house gets some rice and fish paste. It was enough for some families and not enough for others. When we cook rice, we don't have electric. We used coal and wood. You have to keep the wood dry to make a fire. In my house I usually cook for like 30 minutes...it took a long time to cook. Sometimes we didn't get enough coal. When the coal was finished, we used the small pieces in the bottom, we added water to it and put it in the sunshine so we can use. Every year we have to make a new roof. Sometime if we don't have money we have to go to the forest near camp. The Thai soldiers wouldn't let us go there. If they saw us...(Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Despite having lived through such adversity, Bee boasted that her school was considered one of the top schools in the camp because the medium of instruction was English.

Bee loves to accessorize her clothing and makes it a point to add a little style to every outfit by wearing a necklace, watch or hair clip to match it. Her bright smile, competent oral communication in English and friendly mannerisms have made it easy for students, teachers and office staff to ask her to translate since no Karen speaking adults are on site.

Bee's binder is decorated with pictures of her friends from the camp in Thailand. I noticed the picture of three girls standing against a backdrop of lush tropical greenery with a caption that reads "I will never forget you." She told me they are her best friends,



one in Australia and the other in England. Bee wants to visit them someday.

Her family attends the Burmese Church in South Palm every Sunday. Bee is active in her community. For the past two years, she has performed a Karen dance at the new-year celebration. When I asked her about the event, she could hardly contain her excitement about the fact that there were many more Karen people at the celebration this year and that even some of her friends in Canada had seen her pictures on the Karen community website.

### Thura

Soft spoken Thura is 17 years old and in the 10th grade. He is tall for his age and his baggy clothes make him look even taller. Thura is the eldest of three brothers, one who also attends the same high school. His family has lived in a dilapidated two bedroom apartment building in the heart of the Cherryvale neighborhood in South Palm since their arrival in fall 2007. Thura is noticeably thoughtful before he speaks: he pauses to find the right word instead of saying the first word that comes to his mind. His handwriting is so immaculate that one would never guess he went to school for the first time at the age of nine in a refugee camp in Thailand.

When I asked him why his family came to the U.S., he said

Burmese army...it's hard to say. You have to pay them money too. They don't like Karen people. You know right now in Burma, Karen people have to run away. We take the car to Thailand...it took two days. We bring nothing...only clothes. My mom walked for five days. We didn't go together. I went in the car with my brothers. My father was already in Thailand...I was 2 when he left Burma. And then, me and my brothers came in the car and my mom walked with my grandmother. My father left because if he stayed, he would have to go to Burmese army (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Thura lived in a bamboo house in a village. His parents were farmers and grew rice and vegetables. He was nine years old and responsible for taking care of his two younger

brothers during their two day escape to Thailand. Thura also talked about how the Burmese army had burned down Karen houses, taken their animals and killed Karen people. I wonder whether he has personally witnessed the atrocities.

Thura also talked about the difficulties of life in the refugee camp in Thailand:

We live in camp but you can not go to other place outside of the camp. We had no electricity and no water. We had to go to a water pump and in the summer we had to wait in line. The UN gave us food two times in one month. Other thing like oil they give one time in one month. I go to the forest...we go find you know sometimes food, vegetables. Sometimes we cut the bamboo. We go sometimes in the night time. Sometimes I go with my friends, sometimes alone. Saturdays I go with my friends. I bring vegetables. I see Thai soldiers. They don't shoot the Burmese people, but I'm scared because when they see you, they can handcuff you and take you to jail for going to the forest. It's their country. They don't want you outside the refugee camp (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

In addition to lacking basic necessities, Thura recalled being a victim of natural disasters such as heavy rain and flooding that cost people their lives. He also talked about how many people became ill and died of mosquito bites which I presume caused malaria. In art class, he wrote a letter to President Obama expressing his interest in pursuing his education.

When I finish the college, I want to be in the army or be a fireman. I want to help my Karen people because they have a many problems in Burma and they have to run away from the Burmese army...My future is being a good person (Work sample from Thura, December 3, 2008).

Despite learning to read at the age of nine and starting all over in the U.S., Thura is optimistic about his future. He is determined to succeed in school and assure better future for himself and his family.

### Bhutan

Bhutan is a landlocked country, approximately 47,000 square kilometers large, nestling against the Himalayan mountain range with China to its north and India on all

the other sides and a population of 682,321 (CIA Factbook, 2009). In the 1990s hundreds of predominantly Hindu ethnic Nepalese were deprived of their citizenship and expelled from Bhutan while thousands of others escaped the arbitrary arrest and detention and flocked into seven refugee camps in Nepal.

Ethnic Nepalese have lived in the southern part of Bhutan for centuries. According to Lee (1998), the early phases of economic development at the turn of the century brought a large influx of additional ethnic Nepalese into Bhutan. In the late 1980's, concern over the increase in the population of and political agitation among ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan prompted aggressive government efforts to assert a national culture and promote national integration. Lee noted the government's early efforts at national integration focused on assimilation through financial incentives for intermarriage, education for some students in regions other than their own, and an increase in development funds in the south. However, eventually integration came to include tightening control over southern regions, and expelling ethnic Nepalese.

Human Rights Watch (2003) documents that beginning in 1989 more discriminatory measures were introduced against the ethnic Nepalis by the majority ethnic Ngalong government. The measures were aimed at shaping a new national identity, known as Drukpa which is based on the customs of the Ngalong ethnic group predominant in the western part of the country. Human Rights Watch (2007) reports Drukpa measures included requirements that national dress be worn for official occasions and as a school uniform, the compulsory teaching of Dzongkha as a second language in all schools, while banning instruction in Nepali as a second language.

Furthermore, beginning in 1988, the government refused to renew the contracts of tens of thousands of Nepalese guest workers and citizenship became a highly contentious issue. Requirements for citizenship first were formalized in the Citizenship Law of 1958, which granted citizenship to all adults who owned land and had lived in the country for at least 10 years. However, in 1985 a new citizenship law required that both parents be citizens in order to confer citizenship on a child. In many cases, persons were unable to produce the documentation necessary, such as land tax receipts from 1958, to show residency nearly 30 years before. The government declared all residents who could not meet the new citizenship requirements to be illegal immigrants (Lee, 1998).

According to Lee (1998), the 1985 Citizenship Act also provided for the revocation of the citizenship of any naturalized citizen who had shown by act or speech to be disloyal in any manner to the king, country, and people of Bhutan. Beginning in 1988, the government expelled large numbers of ethnic Nepalese through enforcement of the new citizenship laws. In response, ethnic Nepalese mounted a series of demonstrations, spearheaded by the newly formed Bhutan People's Party (BPP), which demanded full citizenship rights for ethnic Nepalese, the reintroduction of Nepali as a medium of education in the south, and certain democratic reforms.

Characterizing the BPP as a terrorist movement backed by Indian sympathizers, the authorities cracked down on its activities and ordered the closure of local Nepalese schools, clinics, and development programs after several were raided or bombed by dissidents. According to Human Rights Watch (2003), many ethnic Nepalese activists were beaten and tortured while in custody, and security forces committed acts of rape. In addition, local officials took advantage of the climate of repression to coerce ethnic

Nepalese to sell their land below its fair value and to emigrate. As a result, Human Rights Watch (2003) states in 1991, ethnic Nepalese began to leave southern areas of the country in large numbers and take refuge in Nepal: Many were forced to sign ‘voluntary migration forms’ wherein they agreed to leave the country, after local officials threatened to fine or imprison them for failing to comply. In an interview by Human Rights Watch (2003), an ethnic Nepalese refugee woman stated:

I had three children, two daughters and one son. At the time of the census, the dzongdha [district official] called me to bring proof of my citizenship. I brought proof, but the dzongdha said it's not right. After two days, the army was brought by the block head [local official]. At nighttime they knocked on the door. I didn't open it and then they forcibly entered. They told me, "We have heard your brother comes to your house. Is this so?" I said, "I don't know where he is." Then they hit me with the gun. They kicked me and I fell down. I stood up and then they kicked me again, and I fell down again. They said we have to torture you, then only will you tell us where your brother is. Then the army tore my clothes. It was torture; they raped me. It was the army, two of them raped me while the others held me down. The next morning I went to my relative's house, but they told me not to stay with them because maybe the army would come and do the same thing to them. One week later I fled (p. 2).

In September, 1991 the UNHCR began providing food and shelter for over two thousand ethnic Nepalese refugees in Nepal. The number of registered refugees grew to approximately 62,000 by August 1992, and to approximately 80,000 by June 1993: By 2007, there were 106,000 ethnic Nepalese refugees in Nepal. Furthermore, according to the same source, there are 10,000-15,000 unregistered ethnic Nepalese refugees in Nepal and 15,000-30,000 unregistered ethnic Nepalese refugees who are living in India. In addition, there are 45,000 ethnic Nepalese who still live in Bhutan (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

In March 1996, refugees began a series of peace marches from Nepal to Bhutan to assert their right to return to Bhutan. Bhutanese police immediately detained and

deported the marchers who crossed into Bhutan in August, November, and December 1996. In the December 1996 incident, police reportedly used force against the marchers. Such marches were also held in 1998 and 1999 (Lee, 1998). According to Human Rights Watch (2007), the marchers charge that the police assaulted and injured several demonstrators, and then arrested and deported all marchers.

Under international law, ethnic Nepalese refugees in the camps in Nepal have a right to return to Bhutan. Article 13 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states, “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” Human Rights Watch (2003) gathered testimonies of refugees who confirmed being forced by Bhutanese soldiers to sign “voluntary migration forms” under duress and fear of harassment, physical abuse or imprisonment. However, their right to return is not honored by the Bhutanese government which requires refugees to prove to the Bhutanese authorities that they were forcibly removed from Bhutan.

Not only is the Bhutanese government unwilling to allow the refugees back, but it also continues to discriminate against the remaining ethnic Nepali population in Bhutan. Human Rights Watch (2003) reports “ethnic Nepalese have great difficulties obtaining No Objection Certificates (NOCs) which are a pre-requisite for government employment, access to higher education, obtaining trade and business license, travel documents and buying and selling land” (p. 2). Furthermore, the Bhutanese government began a program of resettling Buddhist Bhutanese from other regions of the country on land in the southern part of the country vacated by the ethnic Nepalese now living in refugee camps in Nepal. Human rights groups maintain that this action prejudices any eventual outcome of negotiations over the return of the refugees to the country.

In October, 2006, the United States announced its willingness to resettle up to 60,000 of the refugees in Nepal. According to Human Rights Watch (2003), many refugees expressed gratitude for a durable solution after fifteen years of living in refugee camps. In an interview a father said, “The children’s future is the first thing. They need an identity in this world. They have no identity, in either Bhutan or Nepal” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p.59).

Although the U.S. resettlement offer has given hope to many of the 106,000 ethnic Nepalese refugees, the lack of information regarding the resettlement offer or about the prospects of other durable solutions, such as repatriation to Bhutan, has resulted in increasing tensions among them. In an interview conducted by Human Rights Watch (2003), a refugee said

If I do not go back to Bhutan, my choice would be to stay in Nepal. I want Nepal to give me land and citizenship. I don’t want to sit in the camp. I want land and a house. But if Nepal says no, I prefer to stay in this camp. I know nothing of United States. I am only a farmer. I am unskilled. I don’t speak their language. I can only find work here. My life is here. I want my life to stay the same way. I don’t want to go to some unknown place. I am only a farmer. I want my land. My country is Bhutan. (p. 60).

Many believe that resettlement to the United States rewards the Bhutanese government for the unlawful expulsion of its citizens and undermines their struggle for the right to return to Bhutan. Human Rights Watch (2003) reports nationalist ethnic Nepalese opponents of the resettlement have threatened refugees who speak out in favor of resettlement in the U.S.

#### Refugee Camp Life for Ethnic Nepalese from Bhutan in Nepal

The refugees in Nepal have not been allowed to integrate into Nepalese society, being denied the right to freedom of movement. According to Human Rights Watch

(2003), ethnic Nepalese refugees in Nepal are confined to seven refugee camps where they face highly congested living conditions. Refugees need to apply for permission from the Nepalese government representative in the camps whenever they want to leave the camps for more than one day; they may not leave the camps for more than seven consecutive days. Moreover, they are prohibited from working to generate an income, even within the camp. Thus they are forced into a situation of complete dependency on the support of the international aid agencies.

Over the past 18 years, budgetary constraints have limited the distribution of essential services including shelter, food, fuel, and medical care. For example, according to UN News Centre (2006), the United Nations High Committee for Refugees (UNHCR) could not provide plastic sheeting for refugees to repair their roofs. As a result, many families were forced to crowd together in small dry parts of their huts during the five month rainy season or take shelter in other families' huts.

In addition, Human Rights Watch (2003) documents in 1995 the UNHCR replaced the distribution of kerosene with coal briquettes due to a steep increase in its price. The refugees had used part of their kerosene ration for lighting oil lamps at night since there is no electricity in the camps. After the substitution of kerosene with coal, the camps became shrouded with darkness after sunset. In addition, since the coal they received every month was insufficient, many refugees had to go to the nearby forests to collect firewood, causing violent conflict with the local Nepalese who also rely on the same forests for firewood.

The frustration felt by the refugees has sparked several protests and initiatives aimed at highlighting their plight since 1996. According to Amnesty International's



annual report for Nepal (2008), in May, 2007 one refugee was killed and several injured by the Indian Border Security Force on the border with Nepal when thousands of refugees attempted to march through Indian territory in an effort to return to Bhutan. Human Rights Watch (2003) also reports cutbacks in assistance increased the tensions violence, and child marriage in the camps.

Additionally, women suffering domestic violence are unable to obtain safety or their full share of humanitarian aid because of domestic violence within families and between members of different families sharing the same hut. Female refugees confront not only the hardship of life in refugee camps, but also the injustice of gender-based violence and discrimination. Human Rights Watch (2003) notes refugee women and girls have reported rape, sexual assault, polygamy, trafficking, domestic discriminatory refugee registration procedures and inadequate protection measures. The registration system also prevents married refugee women from applying for rations independently and prohibits them from registering children not fathered by a refugee.

On March 3, 2008 a fire swept through a camp in eastern Nepal devastating its inhabitants. UNHCR (2008) reports an estimated 8000 refugees were left homeless, and more than 90 percent of the structures were destroyed. Many of the refugees lost their identification papers in the fire. Thousands spent the first few nights in the open air until aid agencies came to their rescue by providing them plastic sheets and bamboo for building new huts.

### Isha

Isha has a very distinguished presence about him, even at 15. Soft spoken and dressed in a fitted khaki jacket, he aspires to be a poet and author. Isha was born in a

refugee camp in Nepal and lived in a bamboo hut with his parents, younger brother and grandmother. He was in the middle of ninth grade, in August, 2008, when his family left the camp. When I asked him to tell me why his family came to the US, Isha said,

Actually, my family was not interested to come USA but we are forced to come because we don't have anything in refugee camp. Before, in March all the camp burn by fire and for two months we sit in the jungle in the tent. After two months IOM bring us to the U.S. (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

He said their huts were built so closely together that fire trucks could not get through the narrow roads to save them. Isha shared his grief and loss after the fire.

I used to write. In my country before the fire get burn, I have two books in English and Nepalese. In English one book with famous person and quotation and another book with Nepalese poems and ghazal (sonnets). But then it all burned. I was preparing to write a book but they all burned. I feel so sad. (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Isha mentioned he had to stand in line for hours at the water pump to collect water for his family since there was no running water in his camp. He said there were no computers in the camp and in order to get to a computer they had to walk for more than an hour or ride a bicycle for an hour to get to the nearest town. During our conversation he told me about how he had attended a four hour class on the other side of South Palm in order to receive a refurbished computer. On the way back, they had missed the last bus and walked for nearly two hours at ten O'clock at night to get home (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

It was early on a Saturday morning when I went to interview Isha at his house in a drug and violence infested neighborhood in South Palm. His father opened the gate as Isha looked out through their barred living-room window. The porch entry was covered on both sides with herbs prepared by his grandmother and left out to dry in the occasional autumn sun. An unmatched sofa set consumed most of the space in the small living-

room. Isha translated as his mother and grandmother tried to welcome me to their home with a cup of Nepalese tea. As he translated word for word, I could feel that Isha already felt an immense sense of responsibility as the eldest child only three months after their arrival in the U.S.

### Kalpana

Kalpana was only one and a half, 15 years ago, when her family was forced to leave Bhutan to take refugee in a camp in Nepal. Kalpana's parents were rice farmers in Bhutan and never learned how to read and write. In Nepal, she lived in a bamboo hut with her parents and younger brother. Kalpana was in 11th grade when her family came to the U.S. in August, 2008. When I asked her whether she knew why her family had to leave Bhutan, she said

Bhutan give torture to Hindus and think Nepalese are terrorist and they will kill us. And they said for Nepalese people, this is not the place to sit and you have to go to Nepal. In Bhutan, they brought guns and killed a lot of Nepalese people. We are Bhutanese refugee in Nepal and they let us sit in Nepal (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Kalpana talked about the difficulties with obtaining adequate food and health services in the refugee camp. She told me they stood in long lines daily at the water pump only to find dirty brown water which made people sick. She spoke of how their food rations also decreased in quality over the years and their allowance of American rice was replaced by "bad Indian rice" (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008). She also complained that their allotted three and a half liters of kerosene were reduced to just one liter, forcing them to break the law in the camp and go to the forest in order to gather firewood.

In addition, Kalpana talked about insufficient health care and facilities at the

refugee camps. She noted although the camp had a hospital with Nepali doctors in the camp, the medication they gave the refugees was of poor quality. With a sad look in her eyes, she said

There are other hospital. There, we can get good medicine. But through the camp, they did not refer us there immediately. When it was the last resort, they refer us. Many people used to die before reaching that hospital (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Kalpana revealed after she and members of her family had gotten sick from drinking contaminated water, they weren't able to receive proper treatment in a timely manner, and their illnesses worsened as a result.

On the day of our conversation, Kalpana had henna on her hair as she came outside to greet me. She told me it is a good way to color hair and make it soft.

Although Kalpana is like most typical teenagers in many ways, she is also, as the eldest child, deeply concerned about her family's economic survival in the U.S. Her big brown eyes glistened as she talked about her aspiration to graduate from high school and attend college to become a healthcare professional. After having lived in the U.S. for less than six months, she is already in pursuit of employment for herself and her father who speaks some conversational English.

#### Tushar

Eighteen year old Tushar parts his onyx black hair neatly on the side and often wears a black backpack on his back, even in class. The youngest of two brothers and a sister, the 11th grader behaves as someone who could be mischievous if given the opportunity to do so. Tushar was in the 10th grade when his family came to the U.S. In art class, he usually sits by himself even though his cousin is in the same class. In history class, he shares a table with a refugee student from Burma and is more talkative. His

calligraphic handwriting stands out amongst other papers.

His family arrived in South Palm in August, 2008, after having lived in a refugee camp in Nepal for over 16 years. He was one and a half when his family was forced to leave Bhutan and seek refuge in Nepal. When I asked him whether he knew why his family left their country, he said

Due to the language that is spoken...they didn't give us chance to speak our language and our people start to protest against the government and government throw us away (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

When I asked him about his family's journey to Nepal, Tushar said it took several days. He admitted although his parents had told him about it, he didn't know how to articulate all the details in English. He recalled parts of their story

When the Bhutanese government chase us from our home, Indian vehicle used to come outside the homes and tell "Get up fast!" They put all of our properties inside their vehicle and turned their vehicle towards India. In India, we spent one night and then we leave India (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar described life in refugee camp as miserable, hopeless, and grim. Lack of basic necessities such as cooking fuel in the camp forced them to go to the forest causing conflict with the natives who also depended on the forest for resources.

T: The cooking oil they gave us was insufficient for us. We had to get firewood from the forest. When we went to the forest, the people from the village used to chase us from the forest and don't let us to go inside the forest because we are not the citizen of Nepal and they would not let us get their things.

N: How could they tell if you were a citizen of Nepal or not?

T: because we are in camp and they are outside. They look at us and they know.

N: Did you go to the forest too?

T: Yeah I used to go because we have to eat...that's why. We used to go in early night like in 2 O'clock or 3 O'clock we used to go in forest. If we go later than that, then we will not get chance to bring the wood. We have to go early in the morning (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

On the day of our conversation, Tushar rode two buses for an hour in order to

meet with me. He said he left his house early to explore the bus route and stumbled upon a Nepalese store along the way. He told me he got off the bus, went inside the store and saw many familiar groceries and household items from his country. Even though Tushar told me he is excited about starting a new life in the U.S. where he has many more opportunities than there were in the camp, I sensed a feeling of homesickness and loneliness between his words (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

### Liberia

Liberia lies just north of the Equator on the Atlantic coast in West Africa. It borders Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast with a tropical climate: much of the country is rainforest. According to CIA Factbook, (2009), Liberia's population was approximately 3.34 million in July of 2008. The main ethnic groups are Kpelle, Bassa, Krahn, Gio, Mano, Mandingo, and Kru. English is the official language, but indigenous languages are widely spoken. Liberians follow Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions.

Flaitz (2006) writes Liberia was established as an independent state by freed slaves from America in 1822. Moreover, for more than 130 years from its founding, politics were dominated by the small minority of the population descended from these original settlers, known as the Americo-Liberians. During that era, although Liberia was renowned for its stability, functioning economy, and good relationship with the U.S, the indigenous Africans were largely excluded from political power.

A Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) documentary entitled "Liberia: America's Stepchild" (Bright, Boucicaut, & Hekkens, 2002) maintains the seemingly pleasant relationship between the United States and Liberia began to fall apart under William R.

Tolbert, who became president in 1971. Tolbert attempted to improve the economic and political climate by aggressively introducing many new changes. For example, the same documentary reveals, Tolbert's proposal in 1979 to increase the price of imported rice, a basic part of the Liberian diet, as a tactic to encourage local production was interpreted negatively and provided the spark for violent demonstrations.

Moreover, according to the same documentary, Tolbert welcomed the Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban ambassadors to Liberia at the height of the cold war in order to promote Liberia's political independence. He severed Liberia's ties with Israel and spoke out for recognition for national rights of the Palestinian people. In addition, to encourage political freedom, he renegotiated a better deal with Firestone Tire Company, which up to that point had made an inequitable profit on buying rubber from Liberia.

On April 1980 indigenous sergeant Samuel K. Doe led 17 young soldiers in a coup in which they assassinated Tolbert, executed many of the Cabinet members, and imprisoned dozens of other government officials. However, despite the violent way in which Doe came to power, the U.S. supported him. Many Liberians also initially accepted him as a leader of indigenous origin who could open the democratic process to the entire population and put an end to the political dominance by the descendants of settlers (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes, 2001).

Dunn, Beyan and Burrowes (2001) maintain Doe quickly became an important Cold War ally with the U.S. They add “American aid, which had never exceeded \$20 million per annum prior to 1980, topped \$91 million in 1985, with military aid increasing from \$1.4 million to \$14 million annually” (p. 24). In exchange, Doe did close to everything the U.S. wanted him to do. He granted the U.S. use of Liberia's ports to

deploy its forces, reduced the staff of the Soviet Embassy, and reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel.

At the same time, Doe's government grew increasingly corrupt and repressive, banning political opposition and shutting down newspapers. Human rights violations escalated. Many Liberians and Americans were outraged by the U.S. government's continued support for Doe. The U.S. House and Senate passed resolutions calling for an end to U.S. assistance, but the Reagan administration, still practicing Cold War policy, continued to supply aid (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes, 2001).

After years of protests and pressure, the U.S. government convinced Doe to hold an election. On October 15, 1985, Liberians went to the polls to choose a president. Dunn, Beyan and Burrows (2001) note an election-night vote count gave 63 percent of the vote to Jackson F. Doe, but that count was nullified by the government. Then, the election committee awarded the election to Samuel K. Doe. Consequently, after the rigging of the 1985 elections, many in the opposition movement turned covertly to mobilizing military support from neighboring governments, culminating in a 1985 attempted coup led by General Thomas G. Quiwonkpa. The coup was successfully suppressed and followed by massive retaliatory violence against allies, clients, and ethnic affiliates of Quiwonkpa.

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, U.S. political interests in Liberia also faded. The Liberian Civil War began on December 24, 1989, when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor and other allies of Quiwonkpa, invaded from the Ivory Coast and set off a bloody and destructive seven-year-long civil war. Amnesty International (2007) confirms between 1989 and 1997, Liberia was involved in



one of Africa's bloodiest civil wars, which resulted in the death of more than 200,000 people and the displacement of a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes, 2001).

Human Rights Watch (2004 b) reported amongst other crimes against humanity, Taylor's NPFL became infamous for the abduction and use of child soldiers in war: From 1989 to 1997 between 6,000 and 15,000 children are estimated to have taken up arms. The report documents the story of 12 year-old Patrick F. who spent one and a half years fighting in a government militia and was promoted to commander for his bravery. He told Human Rights Watch researchers:

As a commander, I was in charge of nine others, four girls and five boys. We were used mostly for guarding checkpoints but also fighting. I shot my gun many times, I was wounded during World War I, shot in the leg. I was not afraid, when I killed LURD soldiers, I would laugh at them, this is how I got my nickname, 'Laughing and Killing' (p. 16).

Human Rights Watch (2004 b) also declared in addition to the many abuses committed against child soldiers, girls were routinely raped and sexually assaulted. Many were raped at the time of recruitment and continued to be sexually abused during their time with the forces. Young girls were often assigned to commanders and provided domestic services to them. Clementine P. was 15 when abducted by Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) fighters. A survivor of multiple rapes, she told Human Rights Watch (2004 b):

My Ma and Pa are dead, I have no one to help. When the rebels came, I was small, they forced me to go with them. I got pregnant from the fighters. When the time came for birth, the baby died. Four or five of the boys pushed on my stomach to force me to get rid of the baby, my stomach now is broken (p. 10).

After eight years of horrific combat grave human rights violations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) working with the United Nations and

Charles Taylor was finally able to establish a peace agreement in 1997. Dunn, Beyan and Burrowes (2001) acknowledged between 1997 and 1999, Liberia enjoyed a period of relative calm and received international aid to rebuild. However, much of this aid, they argue, was quietly funneled into Taylor and his cabinet's personal accounts. Furthermore, leaders in Ghana and Nigeria accused Taylor of supporting rebels in Sierra Leone.

Charles Taylor's government continued to function without accountability, exacerbating the ethnic divisions and resentments fueled by the war. According to Human Rights Watch (2004 a), between 2000 and 2003 two major rebel groups emerged as a result: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). They began advancing through Liberia, resulting in mass starvation, exile, rape, and other war-related atrocities.

Human Rights Watch (2002) reported Taylor steadily consolidated and centralized power by rewarding loyalists and intimidating critics. Consequently, state power was misused by high ranking officials to avoid accountability, and for personal enrichment. Government troops and pro-government militias killed, tortured and abused civilians, raped women and girls, and abducted civilians for forced labor and fighting. They looted and burned towns extorted money and other goods from those seeking refuge. Human Rights Watch (2002) documented:

In September 2001, scores of ethnic Gbandi civilians who had been captured in the bush by government troops were taken to Kamatehun, where the troops forcibly confined some thirty of them in four houses and burned them to death. The troops killed another fifteen civilians by cutting their throats (p. 4).

The war in Liberia became more complex because of shifting military and political alliances, based on ethnicity and other factors, that were established over the years among the governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea and the various armed

opposition groups. According to Human Rights Watch (2002), Taylor provided significant military aid to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel forces in Sierra Leone to facilitate its war against the government. The report declares RUF rebels committed widespread atrocities against Sierra Leonean civilians, murdering and mutilating thousands and establishing amputation of the hand as its signature abuse. In return, when Taylor's government came under armed attack from Liberian dissidents between 1999 and 2001, RUF forces assisted in fighting them. Human Rights Watch (2002) reported

In September 2000 to April 2001, combined forces of Liberian government troops, RUF fighters, and Guinean dissidents, launched cross-border raids into Guinea, where they attacked towns and refugees camps containing Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, causing thousands to become further displaced and killing and wounding hundreds of refugees and Guinean civilians (p. 9).

Charles Taylor was directly responsible for instigating the long-standing aggression and violence in the region. A report by the U.S. Department of State (2004) notes on June 2, 2003, a United Nations tribunal finally indicted Taylor for crimes against humanity. On August 4, 2003 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a peacekeeping force to Liberia to serve as an inter-positional force between government and rebel forces. A few days later, on August 11, President Taylor resigned, and fled into exile in Nigeria. .

On October 1, 2003 that the U.N. commenced a peacekeeping operation in the country (UNMIL) to support the peace process. Two years later, by October, 2005, conditions improved enough to hold presidential and legislative election. After a close election, noted by Dunn, Beyan & Burrows (2001), Liberian citizens voted in favor of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia's first democratically elected female president. Taylor was arrested in Nigeria on 29 March 2006 and was subsequently transferred to The Hague for

trial where he has entered a plea of not guilty for charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. *Jurist Legal News and Research* (Carmella, 2009) reports a verdict in the war crimes case against Charles Taylor is expected in early 2010.

#### Refugee Camp Life for Liberians in Ivory Coast

According to a report by Amnesty International (2003), since 1989, when the civil war broke out in Liberia, about one million Liberians were forced to flee to neighboring countries, mainly Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. However, due to war and civil unrest in neighboring countries, tens of thousands of Liberian refugees did not know where to turn for effective protection. Amnesty International (2003) declares they were not secure in Ivory Coast, where they were the victims of atrocities committed by the various factions and rebel groups, who looted their possessions, and forcibly recruited them into their ranks, while at the same time accusing them of supporting their opponents. In addition, they could not return to Liberia, where the situation worsened every day. Moreover, other neighboring countries would not welcome them because they were perceived to be trouble-makers.

Corroborating accounts collected by Amnesty International (2003) indicate that armed Liberian rebels crossed the border into Ivory Coast, fought with rebel groups from Ivory Coast and were responsible for serious atrocities against the civilian population including refugees from Liberia. Amnesty International (2003) gathered testimony from several refugees who lived along the border in Ivory Coast and had to flee because armed men from Liberia harassed, ill-treated or killed people, and looted their belongings. Moreover, these armed groups recruited Liberian refugees, sometimes forcibly, including children under the age of 18.

Although atrocities were committed by the rebels against Liberian refugees, the refugees were accused of fueling the rebellion in Ivory Coast by some sectors of the public and by a xenophobic media. This accusation was based on the proven presence of Liberians in the armed opposition groups. To make matters worse, emphasized Amnesty International (2003), the government forces of Ivory Coast also recruited Liberian refugees, sometimes against their will into the army. The same report declared Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone were abducted and forced to haul loads of weapons and goods under threat of injury or death. Unable to remain safely in Ivory Coast, tens of thousands of desperate Liberian refugees returned to their own country, despite the war that was raging there.

According to Amnesty International (2003), one of the most serious incidents of the victimization of Liberian refugees in Ivory Coast took place in the early hours of February 26, 2002, in the village of Akouédo, near Abidjan. A witness told Amnesty International representatives what happened:

Between 3.30 and 5.30 a.m. on 26 February 2003, government forces carried out a raid in our area in Akouedo village where a large number of Liberian refugees are living, as well as nationals of other countries. The raid concentrated on the Christian Fellowship Church and nearby buildings. Gendarmes and soldiers carrying out the raid said they believed the church was being used to hide arms and rebels. Refugees were beaten with cassava sticks, insulted and threatened with death. Liberian refugees and nationals of Burkina Faso were made to fight each other while the gendarmes, police and soldiers watched and jeered (p. 10).

In addition, refugees also told Amnesty International (2003) that it was difficult to get access to medical treatment and that they had been turned away from some hospitals. A Liberian refugee told the Amnesty International delegation “I was turned away from Cocody hospital on 4 November 2002, even though I was obviously suffering from a painful stomach ailment. Hospital staff said they did not want to treat “aggressors” (p.

12).

According to Amnesty International (2003), many educational structures for refugee students in Ivory Coast collapsed as a result of ongoing violence. Their report confirmed that since September, 2002, all the schools in the area were closed. The teachers who no longer received their salaries fled leaving the children to their own devices. Amnesty International delegates also met some young boys in Korhogo, a town in the north of the country, who had become shoeshine boys or had been recruited to fight but who secretly expressed their wish to go back to school.

Sexual violence and rape were also widespread in refugee camps. Save the Children's (2006) study utilizing group discussions and in depth interviews with 158 children and 167 adults from four camps exposed alarming trends of Liberian children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse. In their interviews, they found reference was consistently made to men with money or status as the perpetrators. In addition, camp officials, humanitarian workers, businessmen, UN peacekeepers, government employees and even teachers were frequently cited. In the report, all of the communities and camp inhabitants described the widespread nature of the problem and the fact that sex in exchange for goods, as a means of survival, had become a common option for children to support themselves and their families.

Despite HIV and AIDS awareness-raising workshops having taken place in every camp, particularly among the children. Save the Children (2006) researchers were told by the men and the women that humanitarian agencies doing the training were also involved in the sex trade. One refugee stated "As for the NGOs, they are carry out

awareness on sexual exploitation, HIV and AIDS and STDs, but during the night hours they are the same people running after these 12 years girls” ( p. 15).

Save the Children (2006) maintains refugees were forced to look for money and food elsewhere due to a severe shortage of basic necessities and income, thereby exacerbating the problem of sexual exploitation. Most refugees they interviewed complained of lack of sufficient food and delays in the food supplies as well as having to spend long periods of time, sometimes days, in the hot sun or rain waiting in line for food. In addition, the report revealed, that some people who had ration cards were told that their names were not on the list and that they would have to buy the food from the aid workers or have sex with them in order to obtain food.

#### Fabiola

As she walks boisterously through campus waving at or greeting friends, Fabiola stands out in any crowd. She loves wearing bright colors and bangles that paint a cheerful palate representing her personality. Fifteen year-old Fabiola was born in Liberia, but spent most of her life in a refugee camp in the Ivory Coast. She lives in a two bedroom apartment with her younger sister, grandparents, aunt, and cousin in the Cherryvale neighborhood of South Palm; her parents were killed in Liberia. During our conversation, Fabiola mentioned her little brother has been left behind in Liberia. He was separated from their family for a long time and has been found recently by extended family members. She was worried for his safety and expressed a desire to help and be reunited with him again.

Fabiola was unable to register in school at the refugee camp in Ivory Coast because her extended family could not afford to pay the school fees. When they arrived

in the United States in 2004, she was enrolled in the neighborhood middle school which she attended for two years. This is her second year in high school being in tenth grade. Besides English, Fabiola speaks French which she learned in Ivory Coast and Grebo, her grandfather's native language. Her creativity in photography won her a first place award at a photography contest sponsored by International Rescue Committee in 2007. The award winning photograph showed refugee children working to repair and maintain their apartment complex in South Palm.

In math class she sits next to another refugee student from Liberia and helps him from time to time. Mostly, they joke around and focus on their own work. Fabiola is outspoken and ambitious. In my observation of her in art class, Ms. T asked who plans to go to college and she automatically shouted "I am...I'm going to college!" (Classroom Observation, December 4, 2008).

#### Simon

Outspoken and inquisitive Simon is 18 years old. He was a toddler when his family escaped Liberia to find refuge in Ivory Coast. He arrived in the U.S. four years ago with his parents and three younger sisters. Neither Simon nor his siblings were able to go to school in Ivory Coast due to poverty and their family's inability to pay their school fees. In my interview with Simon, he said:

We came here because in Liberia if you want to go to school, it cost a lot of money. Our family was a poor family. That's why we came to America to go to school because to go to school in our country is cost a lot of money. We have to pay the registration fee and the school fee (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Simon struggles to understand concepts in math and improve his writing, but he is determined to succeed because he values the opportunity to become educated in the U.S.



During my conversation with him, Simon also revealed some details about their exodus from Liberia to Ivory Coast. He discussed how he and his sister Bella were barely walking when their family made the dangerous one week journey to safety across the border from Liberia into Ivory Coast. He remembered having to cross a river in a canoe. He declared:

At that time my eyes were not open clear but after the war finished my mom explained everything. In the whole family I am the only boy child. All my people are dead during the war time. So, I am the only boy child among the whole big family (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

I did not ask Simon about the atrocities he may have witnessed at such a young age, but wonder about everything he hides behind his buoyant personality. It is clear from Simon's words and demeanor that he carries a heavy responsibility on his shoulders as the eldest male member of his family to attend school in the U.S.

### Bella

Bella's warm smile and captivating personality resemble that of her brother Simon. She was born in Liberia and was a toddler, like Simon, when their family left their homeland. Bella lives in a modest two bedroom apartment near McArthur Avenue in South Palm. She is 16 years old, loves music and would like to play the violin and cello someday. Bella is excited about and has already signed up for the afterschool dance class that will be offered. She is also interested in acquiring other languages and has learned how to say a few words in Arabic and Spanish from her friends at school.

Bella can often be seen eating lunch with her younger sister Candace and their good friend Fabiola. Sometimes they all go to the gym to play basketball together. Bella was also unable to attend school in Ivory Coast and learned how to read, starting with the alphabet, four years ago upon their arrival in the U.S. She has a tutor through

International Rescue Committee (IRC) who has been helping her improve her academic skills for the past three years. In fact, after they had little success at their neighborhood high school, her tutor assisted all three siblings to be transferred to their current high school.

Bella is motivated to continue her studies and aspires to enroll in college after high school. She wants to work and supplement her family's income and send money to her sister who lives in a village in Eritrea. Her family was separated from her sister during the war and they have just reestablished contact with her. Bella speaks of her four nieces and nephews in an adoring way. She wants to start earning money so she can help support them.

#### Casandra

Casandra is 14 and the youngest child in family and the only one to have been born outside of Liberia. In my interview with her, she wanted me to know that even though her parents are both Liberian, she is from Ivory Coast as well as Liberia because she was born there. She shyly admits that she does not speak French like the rest of the people from Ivory Coast.

In art class, Casandra prefers to sit by herself and speaks only when spoken to. I was pleasantly surprised about how vocal she was during our conversation. She admitted to being shy but funny at the same time. Casandra also did not go to school until her family's arrival in the U.S. four years ago. Yet, similar to her older siblings, she also wants to continue her education. In her letter to President Obama assignment she revealed "I dream that I graduate from college and become a doctor for a job" (work sample collected November 4, 2008).

For Casandra's collage assignment in art class, she drew the Liberian flag and wrote "No War! No Soldiers" across it displaying her desire for peace. Casandra wants to live in tranquility but is worried about the gang violence in her neighborhood. In her letter to President Obama she also expressed her concern about shooting, gangs and house burning in South Palm. Though she does not express it verbally, Casandra's sensitivity is clear in her drawings and in her writing.

### Meskhethian Turks

Meskhethian Turks are a group of Turkish-speaking Muslim people originally from Meskhethia (now known as Samtskhe-Javakheti), a part of southern Georgia that borders with Turkey. Today, as a result of deportations and discrimination, Meskhethian Turks are widely dispersed throughout the former Soviet Union. According to Swerdlow (2006), currently an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 Meskhethian Turks live in nine different countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and the United States.

The term Meskhethian is used by those who view the population as ethnic Georgians who converted to Islam and learned to speak Turkish when the region was under Ottoman rule. Swerdlow (2006) explains the term Meskhethian is used by some Meskhethian Turk leaders and officials of the Georgian government to emphasize an underlying Georgian identity. Other Meskhethian Turks see this term as a denial of their Turkish identity. Swerdlow cautions it is important to recognize that many Meskhethian Turks prefer simply to be called Turks and reject all other terms.

Meskhethian Turks carry a legacy of decades of exile which includes violation of their human rights, the right to be recognized by their ethnic identity, and the right to

claim a homeland. Aydingün, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, & Swerdlow (2006) note that in 1944, Stalin adopted a deportation policy of people he considered to be potentially disloyal due to his fear of a divided Soviet Union. Swerdlow (2006) writes in late 1944, Stalin's right-hand man, Lavrenti Beria, passed an executive resolution declaring the Meskhetian Turks and other smaller groups in the area "untrustworthy populations" that should be immediately deported from the Georgian Soviet republic to Central Asia. As a result, between November 15 and 17, 1944, Soviet troops forcibly removed nearly 100,000 Muslims from the Meskhetian region, confiscating their belongings and placing them in cattle cars destined for the Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Swerdlow (2006), drawing on his ethnographic fieldwork including over one hundred interviews in Russia, Georgia, and the United States, maintains thousands of Meskhetian Turks died during the initial deportation to Central Asia and from cold or hunger in their first years of displacement. He documents the words of

Meskhetian Turk community leader who remembered the events:

At 4 a.m., four soldiers came into our house and said we had one hour to pack. We were not told where we would be sent. About 120 families were loaded into one freight car. We traveled 18 days and nights to Central Asia. Many died of typhoid. At each stop they would unload the dead (p. 1834).

Swerdlow stresses within four years after Stalin's deportation order, 35,000 to 40,000 Meskhetian Turks had lost their lives.

The deportees who survived were sent to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, where they were deprived of nearly all civic and political rights. Aydingün et al. (2006) report most Meskhetian Turks worked as agricultural laborers and had to register several times a month with the state police. In addition, they were not entitled to

travel anywhere outside of their settlement without the permission of the local government authorities. Furthermore, some of the local people discriminated against and were hostile to them.

Soon after Stalin's death, the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, lifted some of the restrictions on other minority groups, but Meskhetian Turks continued to be marginalized. Khrushchev allowed the Chechens and the Ingush, to return to their territories in the Caucasus. However, Meskhetian Turks were forbidden from return to their homeland because during the Cold War era, the region of Meskhetia, located between the Soviet Union and NATO, had become geopolitically important. In addition, Georgian authorities opposed a repatriation of Meskhetian Turks, for fear that their return would provoke antagonism between them and the Christian population living in the area (Swerdlow, 2006).

Unable to return to Meskhetia, most Meskhetian Turks continued to live in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan where nationalist tensions, poverty, and overcrowded conditions were on the rise. According to the New York Times on June 12, 1989, a riot broke out in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan where Uzbeks hunted down members of the Meskhetian minority. The weeklong clash injured 1,000 people, destroyed 650 homes, and resulted in the deaths of approximately 100 Meskhetian Turks. Thousands of Interior Ministry troops were sent to the Fergana Valley in order to re-establish order after clashes.

Swerdlow (2006) maintains in order to alleviate the ethnic tension, the Soviet army evacuated 17,000 Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan to Russia. After the government-sponsored flight, 70,000 more Meskhetian Turks living in other parts of

Uzbekistan fled on their own to Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. Most of the displaced Meskhetian Turks settled in Azerbaijan while others settled in Ukraine as well as the republics adjacent to Uzbekistan: Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Many others found their ways to different parts of central and southern Russia, in particular to the Krasnodar region.

After having been exiled first from Georgia and Uzbekistan, Meskhetian Turks were not granted basic human rights in Krasnodar as well. Aydingün et al. (2006) document authorities refused to recognize the approximately 13,000 Meskhetian Turks who arrived in the region as Soviet/Russian citizens. Furthermore, regional politicians used xenophobia against non-Slavic people to keep the Meskhetian Turks, a stateless people by denying them the right to register their residences in the territory. As a result, basic civil and human rights, including the right to employment, social and medical benefits, property and land ownership, higher education, and legal marriage, were denied to Meskhetian Turks.

The desperation of the Meskhetian Turks reached a peak in June, 2002 when, the regional authorities placed a ban preventing Meskhetian Turks from leasing and cultivating land. Consequently, nearly 40 Meskhetian Turks staged a 10-day hunger strike out of desperation because they were left with virtually no means to support themselves and their families. The strike was suspended after President Vladimir Putin pledged to appoint a commission to investigate the continuous human rights violations in Krasnodar (Sverdlow, 2006).

Due to constant pressure from the international community and nongovernmental agencies working with Meskhetian Turks, Georgia agreed to develop laws and a 12 year

plan that would allow for their repatriation. However, the country still struggles to sustain refugees produced by two other regional interethnic conflicts. Moreover, authorities fear that Meskhetians' return could spark further interethnic clashes in Georgia (Swerdlow, 2006).

At last, in 2004, the U.S. government joined the international effort to address the ongoing crisis and accepted the option of U.S. resettlement for the Meskhetian Turks of Krasnodar nearly 60 years after their initial expulsion from Georgia. Approximately 12,000 Meskhetian Turks from the Krasnodar region have been accepted for resettlement in the United States (Aydingün et al., 2006).

#### Yosra

Yosra is 15 years old and has been in the US for three and a half years. She lives with her parents and is the second eldest of three children. Yosra's jet black hair frames her pale complexion and bright green eyes. When I asked her why her family came to the U.S. she said, "We decided to come to America because in Russia we didn't have a good life and Russian people didn't want Turks there" (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009).

In class, she is usually one of the first to complete her work. In art class, students were taught about effective signs and then asked to draw a sign representing something important. Yosra drew a Turkish Flag and trees. When I asked her what her sign represented, she said, "the color red stands for war, the white for peace and new trees are growing for a new beginning" (Yosra, Classroom Observation, November 3, 2008).

Although she appears jovial in class, during my interview with her I could sense she missed her family in Russia. She spoke fondly of her grandmother and cousins and

how she talks to them on the phone from time to time. She revealed that she was more excited to be in the US when they first arrived but now considers life here mundane.

In this chapter I included detailed country profiles on Burma, Bhutan, Liberia and Meskhetian Turks. In addition, the chapter consisted of two student profiles from Burma, three profiles from Bhutan, four profiles from Liberia and one profile of a Meskhetian Turk. Each student experienced grave violations of his/her human rights either in their native country or a neighboring country prior to arrival in the US. Their stories will be analyzed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

In this chapter I present an overview of the findings. Based on the generative themes that emerged from my data set, I address each research question separately and discuss sub themes which emerged from most of the data. Throughout my analysis I use samples of raw data from refugee students and teachers to illustrate the findings.

#### Overview of Findings

In the following sections, I present the main findings and generative themes for each research question. While reviewing my data set, a number of significant broad generative themes emerged regarding the educational experiences, emotional and psychological needs as well as academic needs of refugee students. In general, refugee students have specific educational experiences as well as emotional, psychological and academic needs which must be extracted from them on a case by case basis by their teachers and school community in order to gain a deeper understanding of each student and improve his/her success in school in the US.

#### Research Question #1:

What Are the Educational Experiences of Refugee Students at South Palm International

#### High School?

The educational experiences of refugee students vary widely and are defined by their families' socio-political and economic status as well as the political state of the native country, refugee camp and or host country. The themes of adversity and poverty pre and post arrival, fragmented schooling as well as motivation and hope emerged in analyzing the data on educational experiences of students at South Palm International

High School.

### Adversity and Poverty: Pre Arrival

Nine students and one teacher revealed poverty and adversity in their native country and or a refugee camp influenced their access to education. For example, Bee talked about how school was very expensive at the refugee camp in Thailand, and her parents worked illegally outside the camp in order to support the family and pay for their tuition fees.

My family come to American because in camp life is so very difficult. I born there and our life is never improve. We don't have a choice to go outside the camp and we don't have work. Our life is like poor inside and we also can't go to college or high place in education. Sometime I remember we don't have money...we don't have a lot of money to eat something, and my grandmother have a chicken and we took one egg and ate together...we take a little bit each ...(Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Five students described the school and classroom conditions at the refugee camps as substandard. Isha, Kalpana, Tushar, Bee, and Thura described their schools as structures made of bamboo thatch covered with tin roofs. They also stated each class had at least 50 students with a total of over a 1000 students. Kalpana described her classroom

In my classroom ...we used to sit in bench and there was a blackboard also. The school is like made up of thatch and bamboo. Something like 1,200 students and in one class 46 to fifty students (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

In addition, Thura mentioned the lack of basic school supplies and reported they were only provided paper and pencil by the school (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008). All five students who were able to attend school in the refugee camp were segregated from the local population and taught by teachers from the refugee community.

Two of the students talked about having had to work in order to help support their

families. As a child, Bee learned to sew and embroider clothes. She revealed her schedule after school

I learned to sew flowers. Monday to Friday I go to school and in the evening I study and sew. On Saturdays we sew from the morning to the evening. The first time I made 5-6 clothes in one day. I made money by selling them (Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Tushar also declared he had to go outside the refugee camp with his family in order to find work. He stated “We used to go in groups to build houses...like in local area and digging and getting load. It was very difficult. Work in US is very easy” (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008). Having to work outside the camp meant interrupted and fragmented schooling for many of the refugee students.

Four students attended school for the first time in their lives upon arrival in the U.S. and one upon his family’s arrival in a refugee camp in Thailand. Simon, Bella, Casandra, and Fabiola never went to school in Liberia because their families could not afford to send them to school. Simon explained

We came here because in Liberia if you want to go to school, it cost a lot of money. Our family was a poor family. That’s why we came to America to go to school because to go to school in our country is cost a lot of money. We have to pay the registration fee and the school fee (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Fabiola also learned to read three years ago, in junior high school, when her family arrived in the US from Liberia.

N: How many years did you go to school there?

F: I went to school for three years.

N: And how was that school the same or different than this school?

F: They worked hard on me...everyday I stay after school to catch me up...cause my English teacher she was really nice to me.

N: So what subjects did you learn in Ivory Coast?

F: I didn't go to school there.

N: So the teacher that helped you is ...

F: It was here in my middle school...I didn't go to school in Ivory Coast cause you had to pay for school.

N: Even if you're a refugee you have to pay for school?

F: Yes (Interview with Fabiola, Friday, November 21, 2008).

Two Karen students also revealed periods of fragmented schooling. Thura declared his lack of schooling in Burma and having learned to read for the first time when he was nine years old upon his family's arrival at a refugee camp in Thailand.

N: Did you go to school in Burma?

T: No, I'm not.

N: So you were nine years old and your family had to leave Burma and you went to Thailand. Tell me about Thailand.

T: In Thailand I went to school.

N: What language did you learn to read in?

T: Karen language, Burmese language and English, little bit (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Bee also shared stories of numerous heavy floods in the camp suggesting she must have missed weeks if not months of school in Thailand. All five students who missed years of schooling have learned to read and write in English since their arrival in the US.

Yosra, whose family did not live in a refugee camp, also discussed the adversity of life as a minority in Russia, namely, the discrimination against Meskhetians by the locals. She stated, "The kids in my school were all Russian and I was the only Meskhtian. But in some of the schools they separated Russians and Meskhtians

(Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009). Yosra's comment reveals her firsthand knowledge of blatant, systemic discrimination against her people in Russia.

Ms. Tran articulated her observation of some of the educational experiences of each group of refugee students.

With the Nepalese students, they seem to have a strong foundation in formal education...so it's more about encouraging them to step outside of their own community in school and encourage them to speak a lot. I think that they were also taught some pretty British English. With the Karen students, because they had very spotty education, what's necessary is to identify where their gaps are and if we can, identify any learning disabilities. For the Liberian students because they've been in the US for a longer time and have sort of assimilated into African American culture to some extent, I think what's critical for them is that we keep tabs on their reading abilities cause their literacy level is not that great to start with (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

#### Adversity and Poverty: Post Arrival

After their arrival in the US, refugee students' educational experiences are still circumscribed by poverty and lack of access to adequate resources. Ms. Tran noted her concern that since many refugee families struggle financially, students may drop out to find full time employment in order to help their families.

The IRC helps them for up to 8 months. They can't learn what they need to function on their own after those 8 months and then they're just sort of lost. Some families manage to jump out there and make ends meet and others become really dependant on the IRC and then the student become their translators and then the students are responsible for their family's welfare. Like Simon, I think is thinking of leaving school now cause he's the man of the house...he needs to get a job and take care of his family (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

The task of staying in school is especially difficult for older students like Simon who have had extensively fragmented schooling and are still performing far below their grade level.

In addition, the urban South Palm Unified School District does not provide

transportation to students due to a district financial crisis. Many students have to rely on public transportation in order to and from school everyday. All ten students mentioned traveling to school for at least 45 minutes each way by public transportation as a major difficulty about their current school. Three students mentioned they live in dangerous neighborhoods and are often afraid to walk to the bus station early in the morning and are consequently late to school. Moreover, five students mentioned they can not take advantage of afterschool tutoring support at school because they need to arrive home before dark. Bella expressed some of her frustrations.

N: What are some things that are challenging or difficult for you in school?

B: We have to leave the house at 6:30 to be at the bus stop. If we miss bus number 40 we have to walk to Sensational St. and it's 10 blocks away...from the bust stop to our school. It takes like 60 minutes! (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

### Motivation and Hope

Despite their experiences with adversity, fragmented schooling and poverty, all ten students expressed motivation at school and a sense of hope for their future in the US. Four students compared their education in the US to their native countries. Simon and Bella showed contentment with their teachers' flexibility in allowing them extra time to complete assignments.

Teachers are very respectful and good because in Africa if you are taking a test, you can only take the test one time. You can not go back again. Here, you can do it. And they even ask you what time you want to take the test and give you a special day (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Bella stated she appreciates the autonomy and respect given to her in making decisions to complete her assignments.

They don't force you to do it. You have to do it by your own heart. But in my country they force you to do things. Like if they tell you to do your work, you're

gonna do it right next to them until you finish. But here, you tell them can I do it tomorrow, they say okay (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Bee was also very motivated to learn science for the first time in her life.

In every class I got a good grade, but in science I never know I can be good...I never know I was good in science. Science is a lot of activity and we work the whole period and try to finish it. I try a lot in English and Math too (Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Similarly, Isha and Tushar expressed contentment with their teachers, but mentioned in some classes, the work at their current school is too easy for them as compared to their workload at school in the refugee camp in Nepal.

I: When I go to school, I think about the studying is different in Nepal. In Nepal, the things I learned in grade 4 are the things I learn here now.

N: So school is easier here?

I: Yeah, easier. I read extra library books (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Tushar reiterated Isha's view of schooling at the camp and in the US.

T: There it was very hard to sit all day in camp...learning was hard. But here is good. It's simple in here and hard in camp. The subjects we used to read in camp was very difficult. But here it's very simple.

N: So school is actually easier here for you?

T: Yeah it's easier here than over there (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

In addition to being content with their new school in the US, all ten students also displayed a sense of hope about their education and future in the US. Eight students declared they see themselves in college five years from now. Simon discussed his enthusiasm to start a new life in the US and maintain his ties to his roots in Liberia.

I'm very happy because to go to school in America, you don't need to pay money. The government pays the teacher for you. Here, it's free to go to school and easy to get a job. In some people's country, it's hard to get a job. All the jobs finish in

their country. So they need to come here and send money to their country (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Akin to Simon, Bee also expressed her ambition to succeed academically in the US and her desire to contribute to her community.

N: How do you see your future?

B: I feel I will graduate here. I will work step by step. If I can get in college, I will go. I really want to be there and I will try to get a good job too...maybe to translate for refugees too (Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Similarly, Kalpana also revealed one of the reasons she wants to go to college is to become financially independent. She stated, "I want to go college and get a part time job because when we came on the plane, we have to pay back" (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Tushar also articulated his motivation to improve his life in the US.

My history is bad. I was born in Bhutan, I grew up in refugee camp, and now I'm in US. My dream is do something in future. I don't know what that is. But I will accept everything because we have to be satisfied with what we have. First, I want to go university (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

In addition to students' enthusiasm, both teachers also expressed their optimism in working with refugee students. Ms. Shweta shared some of her observations in teaching refugee students and learning about their educational experiences.

I think we just found out about them by getting to know the individual students...student by student because their educational backgrounds are really different. It's not like you can say the Karen kids have this kind of education and the Nepali kids have this kind of education. They're really really different from kid to kid. I'm definitely amazed by some of these kids who are here and English is like their 4<sup>th</sup> language and they are able to keep pace with their classmates who have been here for an extra year or two and have not had a life that's as hard. The resilience of these young people is really something remarkable. To be able to come here in your teenage years, your most vulnerable years in some ways, and just to start over and start a new life. For the most part, refugee students are really sweet. They're a great group of kids to work with... (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).



Given the unique experiences of all ten refugee students, Ms. Shweta's perception is accurate; teachers need to know each student in order to understand their academic experiences.

As observed by teachers and reflected in the data, the educational experiences of refugee students depends on factors such as the extent of the war in their native country, the facilities available at the refugee camp and the family's economic situation. Adversity, poverty, fragmented schooling as well as motivation and hope emerged in analyzing the data on educational experiences of students at South Palm International High School.

#### Research Question #2:

What Are the Emotional and/or Psychological Needs of Refugee Students at South Palm International High School?

In analyzing the data for emotional and psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International School, the students' experiences of loss, nostalgia, fear, PTSD, and culture shock emerged first, followed by their needs for safety, and community.

#### Loss

Loss and fear of further loss was a recurring theme which emerged during my investigation of the emotional and or psychological needs of the refugee students. All ten students reported some form of loss in our conversations. When I asked Fabiola about her family, I knew from the sad look in her eyes that she was about to reveal very painful information.

N: What about your family...are they in Ivory Coast or?

F: My mom and dad? They passed away in the war.

N: I'm sorry to hear that (silence)....oh my gosh...that's...(silence) but you gotta be strong for your sister.

F: I got a little brother too.

N: Yeah? How old is he?

F: Six years old.

N: How cute! So he's going to kindergarten?

F: No, he's not here. He's back in Ivory Coast.

N: How come?

F: Cause we became separated and after we came here they told my grandfather we saw your daughter's child and we were so happy. I wish he was here.

N: Is it possible to get him here?

F: It's very hard! (Interview with Fabiola, Friday, November 21, 2008).

Fabiola is not only grieving the loss of her parents, she also feels afraid of losing her little brother who has been left behind. It must be very difficult for her, especially as the eldest child, to feel so helpless about being separated from her little brother and not having the power or the means to become reunited with him.

Simon also retold some of the story of how his family walked for one week to cross the border into Ivory Coast at one point crossing a river in a canoe. He also disclosed losing his sister during the course of the war.

First the big sister Jane was in Ivory Coast with us. But during the war she was like scared so she ran away. We were looking for her. We searched for her too much. But we did not find her...now we found her. I think she is in Eritrea in a big village. After that, the people say she too old. She cannot come here (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Simon, Casandra, and Bella expressed a desire to go back to Liberia to see their sister and her children. Simon also revealed he wanted to go back to help.

I want to go back to Liberia if I finish my school and if I'm working because some people are left behind in Liberia...some people in our village. They need our help when we grow up. So when we are done with everything, I want to go see my country one more time (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Thura and Bee recounted some of the bitter realities of the refugee camp in Thailand, maintaining they had witnessed loss of lives caused by heavy flooding in the camp.

T: People didn't have food or money...too much rain. There was a flood in the river. I want to say more...but I can't...my English...

N: What happened to the people when it rained?

T: Some people get killed. It's a lot of rain...you know mosquitoes...a lot of mosquitoes. Some people they die because of mosquitoes (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Bee further talked about loss and being afraid for her life when they were victims of severe flooding in the refugee camp.

Sometimes, the water is big flood...big flood I saw two times in my life. When I was three or five was first time flood. The second time is when I live with my grandma. I very afraid the water is very dark and is very fast, if you look in the water. At night we don't know nothing. We sleeeeeep and at night my grandma say what is happening to the grass? It's like light...it's reflect. And we look and water is coming. And we look in our stairs and we look in the ground and the water is coming. We are small and we need money to grow up. My parent go to find money and I lived with my grandma she hurt her leg at that time. And then a flood and my older sister she have to carry us in the nighttime and raining very heavy and some of the children they are die in water (Interview with Bee, 26 October, 2007).

Bee was terrified and had to help carry their belongings to the rooftop with her grandmother and sister not knowing whether her parents were safe. Furthermore, her home, school and neighborhood were destroyed twice by the floods. She also revealed how one of her older friends drowned while trying to save his father.

Bee articulated her feelings of further loss and frustration shortly after her

family's arrival in the US.

When I come here, it was really hard. I miss all my friend...my country... everything. I lost my bag. In that time, I have only a few Karen people here and I don't know how to get it. I don't have electric in my house. I go to other people house to eat there. When the school started, I started speaking English. In my country I learned, but I never speak to my friend in English (Interview with Bee, 26 October, 2007).

Bee revealed she had been very excited when her uncle had shown her a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge back at the refugee camp. However, after their arrival in South Palm, she felt sad and lonely because she missed her family and did not speak English well enough to communicate with others.

Tushar also admitted his loss and shared that he finds himself thinking about those he left behind in Nepal at school.

N: What do you think about at school? Let's say you're in art class and you are doing your work...sometimes you think about your work and other times your mind thinks about other things. What do you think about?

T: I think about my friends and relatives in Nepal. Some of the elder people, we used to know, used to give me blessing for a good life. I think of them...some are dead. They died like that...I think of them (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar has lost his friends and relatives because although they are alive, he knows there is a very slim chance he will ever see them again. He expressed his frustration caused by the loss of his friends who still live in the refugee camp in Nepal.

N: Why wouldn't they want to come here?

T: Because they don't know the language. Their fathers and mothers don't want to come here. They tell my friends "You will not get any rights. Keep quiet and sit! Do whatever I tell you!" Their father and mother don't want to come because they don't know anything like speak the language. People are narrow-minded there. They are conservative. They are afraid of speaking new language they think that if we go to U.S., we will not get a chance to return to our country (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar is unable to mourn his loss and carries memories of drifted relatives and friends with him.

Thura similarly expressed sorrow for his loss and a profound longing to be united with his extended family and friends who still live in the refugee camp.

Sometime I want to go back to my country...see my friends in Burma and Thailand. You know in Burma I want to see my cousin and uncle and in the refugee camp...I want to see my best friend (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Thura, like Simon, Tushar, Bella and Casandra, has not mourned his loss and feels helpless because he can not go back to the refugee camp where he left his loved ones behind.

Isha talked about the loss of a personal belonging in the fire that engulfed their refugee camp in Nepal.

N: Do you write in Nepalese?

I. I used to write. In my country before the fire get burn, I have two books in English and Nepalese. In English one book with famous person and quotation and another book with Nepalese poems and ghazal (sonnets). But then it all burned. I was preparing to write a book but they all burned. I feel so sad (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Even though Isha's loss seems less drastic than other students, I could feel the sorrow of this aspiring young author as he shared the painful memory of losing his books in such a tragic way.

All ten students have suffered loss; whether parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, friends and community members, all need time to mourn and heal as they begin their new life in the U.S.

### Nostalgia

All ten students expressed nostalgia and longing for family and the communities

they left behind and also revealed experiences which illustrate their struggle with culture shock in the US. In addition, Ms. Tran also talked about her own experience as a refugee and her observation of refugee students' struggles after resettlement in the US.

I was very young when my family came. I don't remember being totally brand new. But these kids are not from here yet, and I've learned how alien they can feel and how much they can miss back home; even if back home is a refugee camp. And I've learned the compromises they have to make to fit in and assimilate in a really short time and that it can take a toll on their mental health to not be able to express themselves and kind of be seen as someone who doesn't speak English. I think that would be really hard, not being able to express yourself to 95 percent of the people who come into contact with you in a day. I feel lonely here some days because I can't talk at a level with almost all of my students and for them to come here with the language barrier and the cultural differences, it must be really difficult (Interview with Ms. Tran, November 2, 2007).

Her personal experience of growing up in a refugee family from Vietnam has deepened Ms. Tran's understanding, advocacy and empathy for her students.

When I asked Tushar what he misses about the refugee camp, he stated, "There are some old, old people that used to tell good, good things to me which are useful for my life. I think of them...I think how is their life back in the camp?" (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

In addition to yearning for his elderly friends, Tushar declared he also longs for his relationship with his teachers because teachers were considered extended family there.

T: In Nepal the teacher used to be like our friends. They would even help build a house but here we can not find teacher's homes. They live quite far.

N: Were you close to any of your teachers there?

T: Yeah many teachers were like my friends. They are more older than me but they love me and many of the teachers liked me because I was the best pupil in class. I was simple and not talkative. I would just cooperate with teachers. Here

it's different, we cannot find the teacher's home after school (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar expressed an interest in going back to Nepal to convince his friends' families to come to the US.

I want to take things back from the US to make my friends know and to tell them how it is here. I want to tell them here is good, here is freedom. I wanna take something which can make them believe here is good (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar also revealed he emails his friends who are still living in the camp regularly and even calls Nepal FM radio station to dedicate songs to them.

N: Is that a radio station they can hear in the refugee camp?

T: Yes, it's the best radio station! (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar is seeking ways to stay connected to a community he has left behind and yearns for regularly. He wants them to read his emails and hear his voice so they don't forget him.

Akin to Tushar, Bee recalled some of the activities she misses from the camp.

Every evening everybody come to the well and take shower together in the same place. Every evening... all the children, the mommies, everyone. When we meet we're talking. We take shower together we talk what are we doing the whole day and then we just go home (Interview with Bee, 26 October, 2007).

Bee is wistful about the daily convergence with her community in Thailand where people of all ages not only bathed together, but shared stories that bonded and strengthened their relationships.

She is also nostalgic in reflecting upon her school community in the refugee camp. Bee fondly recalled how the students were responsible for cleaning the school and had morning meetings where they sang and prayed together before starting their lessons

everyday. In addition, she emphasized her education in Thailand included a sense of community outside the classroom.

N: Did you clean the school too?

B: Yes the class have 30 student and in one week five of the student have to clean. Monday is one student, Tuesday is one student and we clean like that.

N: When did they do that?

B: After school...everyday. Somebody clean everyday. Because the school is big if five students clean the school, is very hard. So we do one class, one class. Once a year we have a big cleaning and all of the student pick a dirty thing near the camp and clean it and we follow the river and all of the student we pick the dirt, the trash and we put in a big bag. All of the student, every year we do this. We clean the river (Interview with Bee, 26 October, 2007).

Given her past experiences of growing up in a communal system, Bee must be struggling to understand the rules of an individualistic society and education system in the US.

Casandra and Bella also reminisced about Christmas in their refugee camp in Ivory Coast. Casandra compared Christmas in the US and Ivory Coast and was very clear about her preference.

I liked the Christmas there more than here. Here you just sit in the house and have a party and have Christmas lights. But I never see Christmas tree before...I think some people have it in the city, but I never have it. In our Christmas, everybody have to cook outside. You go to your friends and dance. You put something here (points to her cheek) and you dance all around. Everybody has to braid their hair before Christmas and cover it so nobody can see it. In Christmas you have to put glitter to make it pretty (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Casandra longs to celebrate Christmas the way they used to before coming to the US and can not relate to Christmas rituals here. In addition to missing the familiarity of the celebration, Bella also yearns for sharing the holiday with family in Ivory Coast.

In the night, people have a party. You can sleep anywhere at your cousin's or auntie's or friend's and come back and you watch movie with your friend. Most people like to wear your culture clothing that match with other friends...the same



color, the same design. My mom did it for Casandra and me. We wear the same thing and Simon and my cousin wear the same thing. They called us twins when we walked out (laughs) (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Although they are excited to start a new life in the US, all ten refugee students yearn for the familiarity of the community, home, relatives and friends they have left behind and miss the irreplaceable human bonds they have left behind.

### Fear

Seven students described having been exposed to extreme fear either in their home country or the refugee camp before their arrival to the US. Thura narrated some parts of his family's exodus to Thailand and how they were separated due to fear of the Burmese army.

T: I want to tell about the Karen people in Burma. The government...Burmese army...it's hard to say. You have to pay them money too. They don't like Karen people. You know right now in Burma, Karen people have to run away. We take the car to Thailand...it took two days.

N: Did you bring your things? Cause when we left we couldn't bring anything.

T: We bring nothing...only clothes. My mom walked for five days. We didn't go together. I went in the car with my brothers. My father was already in Thailand...I was 2 when he left Burma. And then, me and my brothers came in the car and my mom walked with my grandmother. My father left because if he stayed, he would have to go to Burmese army (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Thura's family was separated from their father for seven years because of fear that he might be forced to join the Burmese army. Thura also must have been incredibly frightened to cross the border into Thailand without either parent.

Similarly, Kalpana and Tushar talked about their family's fear of being killed by the Bhutanese government.

K: They give us torture to live in Bhutan. Bhutan give torture to Hindus and think Nepalese are terrorist and they will kill us. And they said for Nepalese

people, this is not the place to sit and you have to go to Nepal. That is what they said to Nepalese.

N: But you are Bhutanese

K: But we are Nepalese living in Bhutan. In Bhutan, they brought guns and killed a lot of Nepalese people (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Tushar emphasized the brutal way in which his family was exiled from Bhutan.

When the Bhutanese government chase us from our home, Indian vehicle used to come outside the homes and tell “Get up fast!” They put all of our properties inside their vehicle and turned their vehicle towards India. In India, they spent one night and then they leave India. But while coming, India government give them permission to cross but not while leaving Nepal (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Although neither Kalpana nor Tushar mentioned whether members of their immediate family were killed by the Bhutanese government, they both expressed a very real fear felt by thousands of ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan.

Both Kalpana and Tushar spoke of their fear at the refugee camp in Nepal. They recalled the 2007 uprisings when the ethnic Nepalese tried to walk back to Bhutan through India.

K: We raise our voice against Bhutan when we go for a demonstration...all Bhutanese went up to that Indian gate in the border. India also don't help us. India also torture Bhutanese refugee. And one Bhutanese also died in that demonstration. The Indians shot him and he died. And India did not give us permission to go Bhutan. Indian also supporting Bhutan not to enter their country (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Tushar was also present at the demonstration when an ethnic Nepalese refugee was shot dead by the Indian army.

T: We went to go reach Bhutan but Indian police are go and chase us away from Bridge and blocked our way to go to the border.

N: How long ago was that?

T: That was maybe one years ago

N: Did you go with everybody or did you stay back at the camp?

T: I go with my friends and my brother's friends...everybody was there.

N: Can you tell me some of the things you saw?

T: Yeah...when people go from there (the camps) there was some metal bar and it was written stop and maybe more than 6000 Indian army were there with their gun. When we tried to go, they chased us ...we try for three days. After three days, they start to shoot and it made our people little bit separate.

N: Did you have any kind of guns or ammunition?

T: No, we fought back with empty hands (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Kalpana confirmed her father and hundreds of other refugees ran back to the camp because Indian soldiers opened fire and used tear gas to terminate the demonstration.

Similar to Tushar and Kalpana, Thura reported being afraid of soldiers at the refugee camp. He described how due to lack of basic necessities, refugees were left with no choice but to go into the nearby forest at night to find food and gather wood for fuel.

We go sometimes in the night time. Sometimes I go with my friends, sometimes alone. Saturdays I go with my friends. I bring vegetables. I see Thai soldiers. They don't shoot the Burmese people, but I'm scared because when they see you, they can handcuff you and take you to jail for going to the forest. It's their country...they don't want you outside the refugee camp (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Thura was afraid of being beaten or jailed by Thai soldiers and did not feel safe in the refugee camp.

#### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Given the trauma all ten students were exposed to, they may be suffering from PTSD. Kaplan (2002) notes the factors which contribute to the development of PTSD in children and adolescents include the severity of trauma, parental reaction to the trauma

and the proximity of the trauma. Seven out of ten students revealed intense fear and very close proximity to trauma. I did not ask Fabiola about details of how her parents were killed and where she was when it happened because I was not prepared to give the type of support and counseling she might need.

Ms. Tran shared her observation of Simon's unusual reaction to a fight at school and his ongoing grapple to focus in class.

T: He's had some really strange reactions to things that just make you question.

N: Like what?

T: Like when there was a huge fight in my classroom and I had to get all the students out because it was getting out of control, he was totally un-phased and wouldn't budge. And later on when I asked him about it...I was like I was screaming at you to leave and why didn't you leave? And he was like I had to organize my binder. And the day I was really upset about thefts on campus and I told him I had cried, he was like don't cry, be happy!! He was like yelling at me. So, unexpected reactions to emotional situations. And academically he has major trouble in reading and recalling information (Interview with Ms. Tran, November 2, 2007).

Simon's detachment from others during a violent action in class and his difficulties concentrating on academic tasks can be considered as clear signs of PTSD.

Thura also disclosed information indicating possible signs of PTSD. When I asked him what he wanted to study in college he named a career.

N: What do you want to study in college?

T: I want to be a fireman.

N: Why? What makes you interested in being a fireman?

T: I think if you be a fireman, a lot of people like you. I want to be a good person (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Given the historical context that the Burmese army burnt thousands of Karen homes and farms, it is very possible that Thura either witnessed or has heard first hand stories of

such atrocities.

In fact, Thura's story had a profound effect on Bella who disclosed she heard him talk about it in class.

I learn about the Karen culture. They ran away from the war too. There are people there who don't like them. That's why I try to learn about them because my friend Thura was explaining about his culture, and to all the student. Everybody was quiet and listening to him. And he almost cry. So the teacher said when we see him we should laugh with him because his story was sad and so bad. So I tried to ask him more about his culture (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Bella showed a lot of empathy for Thura because although they are from two different parts of the world, she could relate to his pain and trauma. Similar to Bella and Thura, Casandra seemed relieved for the opportunity to contend with her painful trauma. At the end of our interview, she said, "I wanna say I'm happy for getting everything out of my lungs and for talking to you" (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Isha also showed signs of PTSD. During our interview, he told me he had ranked first in his class at the camp in Nepal and had earned the respect of his peers and teachers alike. When I asked him to compare his relationship with his friends and teachers at school there versus here, he could not respond.

N: You said you ranked number one in your class in Nepal. How was your relationship with the students there different than with the students here?

I: In Nepal...(uncomfortable look, followed by silence).

N: I know...it was hard for me too. Even though I was in the fourth grade when we came here, it was difficult...I ranked first too. But when we came here it was like I don't know the language. It was really, really difficult. So it took a long time. And finally during high school I got my rank back (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

I tried to console Isha by sharing with him my own family's experience of having to start all over in the US.

Ms. Shweta admitted it is very likely that teachers are not aware of PTSD or its signs in adolescent students.

I think PTSD is one of those things that we haven't been necessarily trained to look for and recognize the symptoms of. There definitely are a handful of the refugee students that we don't know have a lot of emotional issues. Whether that is related to what happened before they came here or the refugee process in coming over here, or just the difficulties they're facing in South Palm, it's hard to tell. And again with the lack of native language support, it's hard to have those conversations with kids (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

She did mention that this year the school has hired an afterschool service provider which includes counseling. Ms. Shweta stated several refugee students attend counseling sessions after school. In addition, she noted a campus psychologist is available three times per week, and on Fridays a Spanish speaking counselor provides some services. However, there are no psychological or counseling services in any of the other languages on campus.

### Culture Shock

Eight students expressed feeling alarmed and disturbed by their current school versus their previous school overseas. Bee described her school in Thailand as very quiet. She mentioned the classes were divided by curtains and not walls and was very proud to report if someone walked by their school, he wouldn't be able to guess it was a school because the students were so quiet. Bee confessed the one thing that shocked her about school in the US was there were fights in class and on campus. Bee declared "In Thailand if they want to fight, they fight outside school because if you do something in school, everyone can see you and you shy" (Interview with Bee, 26 October, 2007). The "shyness" she is referring to, I believe, is shame.

The lack of respect in class is shockingly new and disturbing for Yosra as well.

Sometimes I feel bad because no respect. I feel bad because the teacher feel bad. In Russia we used to never say anything to the teacher. When the teacher get in the class, we have to stand up. If you have question, you raise your hand. But here, no...you can yell, scream, everything. In Russia... no! They respect all teachers. They don't make attitude. But here...zero! They talk to older people same as their age and that's what I don't like

N: Would it help you if the teachers were more strict?

Y: Yes, because nobody talks nobody disrupts (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009).

Yosra wants a stricter structure where teachers have more control of the class and the school. The lack of firm authority in some of her classes disturbs her and she feels bad for her teachers.

Isha also complained about the deficiency of respect and the disregard of teachers in his classes.

I: In the US, I didn't see the respect between the teacher and student but in Nepal I used to see respect.

N: How do students behave with the teacher in Nepal?

I: The teachers treat us in good manner and we used to respect them. In the US...there's a ...I don't know. It's different. I don't like to call my teacher by their first name. There, I used to tell my friend to call (get the attention of) the teacher and he used to call the teacher. I don't like to call the teacher by name...only Miss or Mr. (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

The fact that everyone, including teachers, is on a first name basis is considered to be culturally inappropriate and makes Isha uncomfortable. Isha also expressed disturbance by the fact that there is no uniform policy at his current school. He finds comfort in clarity of teacher-student roles and behavior expectations.

Kalpana expressed shock in the lack of respect for teachers in her current school compared to the school in the refugee camp in Nepal.

N: What do you dislike about your school?

K: Most of the student do not follow rules. They do not obey teacher. I don't like that kind of habit. In Nepal, we used to follow our teacher...what did he say. If the teacher is teaching here, they get up and run and making noise and singing song. Sometimes I don't like they do not follow what teacher say. I don't like that type of student (Interview with Kalpana, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Kalpana struggles to make sense of the relatively lenient discipline policy at her current school and can not understand why there aren't harsher consequences for disruptive students.

Simon who couldn't go to school in Ivory Coast shared his frustration with the lack of discipline at his current school and compared it with his parents' description of schooling in Africa.

What I don't like about this school is sometimes kids get up in the class and they want to fight you or something. If you don't want to fight, they think you are scared. But the reason why I don't want to fight is because my parents told me the place that you go, focus on why you go there. Pay attention to the teacher. What is she teaching about? And don't cause noise. In Africa, the teacher beat the students when they are late. So all the students in Africa they are respectful...more than American students. In America when teacher is teaching, the students can get up and start running around and chasing other students (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

In addition, Thura and Bella communicated their disturbance and confusion by the rampant use of profanity in classes.

T: I don't want to be a teacher...student here is really different than Thailand student! They use bad words...you know in Thailand student can not use bad words and yell to teacher. If you say bad word and yell to teacher, you have to get out the school.

N: What about here?

T: Here, teacher tell you first. Only if you fight, you go to the office. In Thailand we don't have students like here. It was different...they don't tell bad words. The friends are different (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Similarly, Bella shared that the inappropriate language perturbed her. She stated, "Some kids feel like they are better than the teacher so when the teacher is talking they can cuss



out. Even when the teacher is screaming, Stop! Stop! They just keep throwing paper”  
(Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

### Safety

All ten students reported they felt safe at their current school. However, five students admitted they did not feel safe in their neighborhoods. One student, Fabiola, who initially attended middle school for two years recalled negative experiences with racism at her first school in the US.

N: What do you think about this school?

F: I think this school is good.

N: Yeah? What are some things you like about it?

F: Things like we're all together and like no bullying cause in my middle school I used to go to, they used to say you need to go back to Africa. Here, like everybody from different part of the world, so I feel much better (Interview with Fabiola, Friday, November 21, 2008).

Fabiola expressed feeling safer at her current school where all students are foreigners and no one tells anyone to go back to where he/she came from.

Isha, akin to Fabiola feels safe at school. However, he is terrified of his current neighborhood because approximately three months ago he was attacked by a group of African American boys as he waited for the bus at the bus stop.

N: Do you feel safe at your neighborhood in America?

I: I worry about all the people like I get...I scare about black people because when I was in bus stop, they beat me last time. I was sitting simply. They check my pockets and see I don't have anything. Then they beat me. I was with my brother and they beat me. I was waiting for bus. I don't know which school they go, but they go this way. First time they are three, when I go to second time, they are group...many many. I change the bus now. I have 4 route to go to school and I change the bus route. I don't see them anymore.

N: I'm sorry. Did you call the police?

I: I tell the school police officer. She say she will bring the photo on Monday, but it becomes like a ...(silent).

N: Oh, you don't feel like they did anything?

I: yeah (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Isha grew up in a refugee camp where he knew the environment, the language and culture. He felt protected because he knew how to behave and what to do in dangerous situations. But he feels very vulnerable in his new neighborhood where neither he nor his family know who to turn to for protection.

Tushar, like Isha and Fabiola, feels safe at school but does not feel safe in his neighborhood. He lives near Isha and was with him the day Isha was beaten at the bus stop.

N: Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?

T: No. My neighborhood is not good. If I see a lot of black guys...I'm so scared because I worry about that. One time when we wait for the bus, they come to get money. They say "Wuz up bro?" They hold me and search my body...it happen two time.

N: Did u call the police?

T: No I call IRC...maybe they called police (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Tushar was also assaulted and humiliated without instigating a fight with the perpetrators. Moreover, no one was arrested for the crime, leaving Tushar feeling helpless and defenseless.

Yosra also shared her family's vulnerability from living in a crime infested urban neighborhood. She recounted how her pregnant cousin was assaulted as she walked to a store in order to purchase groceries.

N: What do you think about your neighborhood?

Y: I think it's a dangerous place cause many people and many groups and gangs and it's dirty. When you cross the street, someone yell something. It happened to my cousin. She was pregnant and it was raining. She was walking to the store. She was like 8 or 7 months pregnant. He started beating her. And then she started screaming. Nobody help. And then I don't know what happen. She falled down on the floor and they took her to the hospital. Nobody know who that was and why...I don't know why...no reason, just come and beat her (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009).

Yosra's family has been discriminated against for three generations. They were driven out of Georgia to Uzbekistan and from Uzbekistan to Russia. In their final exodus from Russia to the US, they hoped for safety and acceptance. Unfortunately, they are still at risk and defenseless in urban America.

Ironically, Tushar and Thura declared they felt safer in the refugee camps. Tushar expressed an immense sense of vulnerability in South Palm.

N: Did you feel safe in Nepal?

T: Yeah I feel safe there. I don't know if I was safe or not, but I feel safe.

N: What made you feel safe?

T: Because there were a lot of people who knew me. But here nobody knows me. If something happen to me nobody will know me and nobody will tell nothing. But in Nepal if I get hurt somebody will ask "Hey why did you do that?" But here, nobody will say nothing to nobody (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Thura also talked about how he was approached by a group of boys who wanted to fight with him as he walked to the bust stop from school. During our conversation he revealed a sense of isolation and fear for his life in his neighborhood and admitted he felt safer in the refugee camp in Thailand.

N: How did you feel in the refugee camp?

T: Yeah I feel safe there. Nobody try to fight with me. You know in Thailand, you don't have a problem. Nobody fight you. If somebody want to fight, my friend can help me. You know...it's hard, I can't say. I wanna say if you wanna

fight with me, I will fight you. But here, I can't say that. I'm worried about that. People here don't know about Karen people. If they have a problem here, they wanna kill people. If I try to fight, they will kill me (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Living in urban America is painfully different from life in refugee camps. Thura, Yosra, Tushar, and Isha feel totally at risk in urban America where neither they, nor their families know how to protect themselves.

### Community

The emotional and or psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International High include a desire for community and collaboration between students, teachers and staff, parents, and refugee support organizations. All ten students reported they were happy at school and thought other students were friendly. Six students have either siblings or cousins who attend the same school; three of them revealed they turn to their family if they have a problem at school. All confirmed they had friends; eight acknowledged having established close friendships with students from different countries at school. All ten students mentioned they liked having students from other countries in their classes and three students indicated an interest in learning the languages of their friends.

Refugee students need to be understood and validated by the classroom and school community. Bella shared her experience in junior high as compared to her current high school. She had no idea the junior high school she attended in the same school district had at least a 30 percent English learner population.

N: Did you get a chance to tell your story and hear other stories in the other school that you went to?

B: No, everyone from our last school was born here or somewhere else inside the United States. But they are not immigrants. Me and my little sister were the

only ones. But I never told anyone (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Her former school's reluctance to include Bella and her sister in the community made her feel excluded and reluctant to share her story.

Casandra articulated her excitement about having friends from different countries at South Palm International High School.

My friend is from Eritrea and I walk with Bella's friend. She's from Yemen. And Mary is from Ghana and Violet is from Ivory Coast. I like this school because lot of kids speak different languages and from different countries. We can learn language and almost all of them speak English so you can talk to them. I have a friend from Eritrea. I'm showing her my language and she's showing me hers. I feel good because I meet some refugee in school too and they all speak different languages, so I'm happy. (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Casandra not only felt her language was important enough to teach her friend, but also she took steps to learn her friend's language. Moreover, she felt a sense of comfort in knowing there were other refugee students at the school.

Yosra also showed delight in having friends from different backgrounds. She admitted there was a difference between her social circle in the large junior high school where she was a student for two years and her current friends at South Palm International High.

N: Who do you go to if you have a problem at school?

Y: I go to my friends or cousins. I have some friends from other countries like Yemen and Nepal. We became friends by working in groups in class. Some of them like Ahlam, I used to know her from junior high but I never talk to her there. But here, we become more closer that we used to.

N: Did you have more friends there or here?

Y: I think here cause the school is small and here you have to talk to other kids. But in junior high it was different...people are born here and raised here but here everybody's from different countries. I think I can be closer to them

because they feel like same as me. When I talk to them in English, they don't make me feel like I speak wrong or something. But in the junior high, if you speak wrong, they're going to laugh at you (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, March 17, 2009).

Having attended two different schools in the US. gives Yosra a unique perspective that can offer a comparison and further insight into this research question.

Bee also expressed a sense of community not only with her own ethnic Karen group, but with students she did not talk to last year.

N: Do you feel like you belong in the group at school?

B: I feel this year there are more Karen people. I feel like in a group because some friends from Nepal also join with us.

N: What did you learn from them?

B: I learn to say hi. There are new students from Africa and I never say hi to them. But I learned to say hi and they say hi and we talk with each other like I like your hair and me too. I tell her and talk to her and I feel like they are nice (Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Bee's friendship with Nepalese and African students is significant given she spent most of her life in a homogenous, predominantly Karen, environment in the refugee camp in Thailand.

Three students indicated they became friends by having to work in heterogeneous groups in classes. Isha described how he became friends with a Karen classmate:

N: Can you describe how you became friends with one of them?

I: Yeah...he's from Thailand. We became friends by sitting near each other. He tried to learn about me and I tried to learn about him. His thinking and my thinking are same (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Both Isha and the Karen student are refugees, giving them a commonality to learn about and discuss their history with each other. Tushar also pointed out how having to work closely with other students resulted in the establishment of a friendship between him and

a Karen refugee student.

N: How did you guys become friends?

T: We just sit near each other and he just tell me about his life and he was just similar like my life and we just get friends. He's from Thailand. Before he was from Burma and just like us he went to Thailand (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

In addition, Casandra shared the need for and importance of recounting their stories in class.

N: How do you feel when other students share their stories?

C: I feel reminded about my country. That it's like the same way that happened in my country before I came here (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Bella was also eager to articulate her interest in other refugee students' stories in class.

B: I feel so quiet...I want to listen to their story. I don't say nothing if they are saying something because I remember everything about my country and after they finish, I say that one happened to my country...this one happened to my country. And I say it's a little bit different from your country. So if they are talking about their story I just be quiet and listen to it. Sooo quiet. I write a little bit about what they are talking about. I write some to add it to my own story because it's a little bit the same. So I like to be quiet when people tell their story (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Isha, Tushar, Bella, and Casandra were able to make meaningful connections with students from other countries because of in-class opportunities allowing them to get to know each other at a deeper level.

Both teachers knew all of the refugee students in their classes and were aware of the general circumstances leading to their asylum in the US. Ms. Shweta was able to articulate specific information about each refugee group at the school.

N: Can you tell me some of the things you know about the refugee students in your classes?

S: We have refugee students from a few different countries...our first set of

refugees that were newly arrived when we opened this school were Karen refugees actually who were born and raised in refugee camps in Thailand. And we also had about three students who were African refugees from Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Since then, we've also received Bhutanese refugees from Nepal who were born and raised in refugee camps in Nepal. I think those are the main groups of refugees at our school. Last year it was about 18 percent of our school and I'm not sure what it is this year. But I think the number has actually risen since then (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Both teachers acknowledged a sense of belonging at school as a key emotional need for refugee students. They emphasized the importance of community and team building activities in meeting students' needs. Ms. Shweta elaborated how community building activities helped improve the school environment.

N: I noticed there's a poster in your room that says my language is beautiful and it says that in every language that's represented by your students.

S: You know we try and do a lot of different things. Most of the team building happens during advisory. The project that you saw was a project that we looked at all the different languages and had the students write my language is beautiful in their language and we hung those up in pretty much every classroom. I can see the difference between my advisory last year and this year that the kids are more comfortable with each other...a lot of kids understand that this is a part of the way we do things here which is really nice (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

The teachers' focus on collaborative activities during advisory and in class was an integral part of the school culture.

Refugee students need to feel empathy from adults. Two students mentioned they go to their teachers in case they have a problem at school. Bella was especially thankful to have supportive teachers.

The teacher help me...they are nice. They also help me for the bus tickets and the tutoring. I know in other school it's not like that. And also the price of our education, as the child of the immigrant is very low. They try their best to teach us and step by step we get better. And I feel like last year I didn't learn a lot because I didn't know what the teacher said. But this year, I feel better because I understand more and I feel like this year my grade is good. In my life I try to be smarter (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).



Bella's hopeful attitude about school can be attributed to her own determination to succeed as well as her teachers' belief in her success despite years of missed schooling in her native Liberia.

In addition to advocacy from their teachers and a sense of belonging at school, refugee students also need to see their parents involved in their education. Ms. Tran talked about the importance of home visits and including parents as a part of the school community.

Ms. Shweta was talking about bringing the Karen kids food when we went for home visits...when the price of rice was really high. The less time consuming way (to communicate with parents) is through phone calls...if a student is absent for more than a couple of days, we just check up and if something has happened to a kid we call the parents to come in. Other times they come in on their own. Sometimes they're afraid to come like Isha's dad was very afraid of calling the police. So we helped explain how things work here and it's ok to talk to the police. Sometimes we take kids to the hospital. Like when Steven jumped over a table in my advisory and put a hole in his leg, I walked into the office. The principal took him to the emergency room. His dad came in and told his son, "Next time, jump higher!" But yeah like just helping them figure out Medi-Cal and taking care of bills and health insurance. Sometimes they need somebody to go with them to take their kids to go see a counselor or a doctor (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Based on Ms. Tran's description, South Palm International High School serves as a community center and extended family to many refugee families.

In addition, there is an open door policy with outside organizations that work directly with refugee families in order to assist in their resettlement. Ms. Shweta explained that representatives of one of the agencies, International Rescue Committee (IRC) came to the school and presented information about one of the latest waves of refugees.

N: How did you come to find out about the background of these students?

S: Because the first big group that we dealt with were the Karen refugees, and

they were placed here to us through the IRC. They actually came to our school before we opened to give us a little background about what is Karen and who are the Karen people and how did this group get classified for refugee status. So the IRC has been a source of education for us about where these kids are coming from and what their background is (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Determining the emotional and psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School requires a close analysis of emergent themes such as loss, nostalgia, fear, PTSD, culture shock, safety, and community. Most students are likely to have felt or are feeling some type of loss, fear and culture shock. As a result, they may be suffering from PTSD and are likely to need a sense of safety and community in their school and classroom environment.

#### Research Question #3:

What Are the Academic Needs of Students at South Palm International High School?

In analyzing the data for academic needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School, the themes of teacher knowledge and collaboration, relevant curriculum, story/narrative, structure, school and community support emerged.

#### Teacher Knowledge and Collaboration

Both teachers were very knowledgeable about the academic history and current needs of refugee students. Ms. Shweta articulated the need to differentiate each lesson based on the English acquisition levels of the students.

We definitely have different expectations for kids based on their English levels and how many years they been here, how many years they've been speaking English. Whether we expect them to write on their own without a template or whether it's more structured and we give them sentence starters and paragraph structures so they're really filling in the blank with the information that they know like their name and the name of the project instead of having to create the whole thing from scratch which is a pretty daunting task in a second language (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

In addition, Ms. Shweta discussed the overall goal for students to pass the CAHSEE in four years, even though the conduit is different for each student based on his/her specific needs.

Overall it's really figuring out where the gap is because I think all of our refugee students no matter how well educated they are, there's something that they're missing in their education. They're not coming to us with a standard 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Maybe they're missing their multiplication tables, maybe they never learned how to divide or maybe they never learned how to punctuate correctly. There's something there that is a gap and the challenge is finding out what that gap is in a class of 25 students where everyone's got some kind of gap and then figuring out the appropriate intervention to address it. Maybe it's something you teach as a whole class because a lot of kids don't know how to do it. Or maybe it's something that you work individually with the student. For example Simon has a lot of gaps in math and he came to me today and said I don't know how to divide. I know he doesn't know how to divide and I was like ok Simon... what day do you meet with your tutor? I'll give you division problems to do. He was like ok. That's something that we can do. We've identified the exact problem that needs to be solved (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Ms. Shweta also explained how she developed a language-free math assessment to be used for student placement in the appropriate math class at the beginning of the year or shortly after their enrolment at South Palm International School.

One of the things I did before we opened the school last year was to develop a diagnostic tool that we use with kids in math class. The problem I have with most math tests is that they are really a test of your ability to do math in English rather than your ability to do math. So I developed a diagnostic test to cover basic skills such as counting and naming numbers all the way through basic pre algebra skills that involve no English. Except when I was specifically testing English like do you know how to spell the number one? So students who were at or above grade level in their country in math scored very well on the assessment even if they couldn't make heads or tails out of an English word problem (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Ms. Shweta's recognition of the problem in most math placement tests and her initiative to provide an alternative exam serve to meet the academic needs of the refugee students because they are often placed in inappropriate classes that are either too easy or too

difficult for them. The tool she has developed assists staff in placing the students in the most appropriate class based on their math, not English skills.

Both teachers have collaborated on certain occasions to expand a lesson across two different curricula in order to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Ms. Shweta described her collaboration with Ms. Tran the year before. Ms. Tran who taught history showed students how to do timelines of their lives and Ms. Shweta showed them how to about how to graph lines on the x,y coordinate plane in math class. Ms. Tran had modeled a timeline by highlighting important events, some traumatic, in her own life thereby creating a safe environment for students to share. Ms. Shweta explained this was a rigorous assignment in math as well: The line had a slope of one and the students had to write the equation of their line and identify the points. Nevertheless, many refugee students were able to write and talk about important events in their lives.

Both myself and the history teacher got really interesting information from the kids about when kids crossed over to the US illegally or when someone in their family who is very important to them died. I know one of our refugee students almost his entire family was killed by the Burmese army. So that was one of the points on his graph. You know...so lots of kids used the graph or the timeline to mark events in their life that were especially traumatic or especially happy (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

The partnership between Ms. Tran and Ms. Shweta resulted in a meaningful lesson in both math and history where refugee students were not only challenged to engage in a rigorous assignment, but they also felt safe to share some of the traumatic events in their lives.

### Relevant Curriculum

Seven students indicated they find lessons that are relevant to their daily lives and incorporate their culture, identity and language useful and interesting. Bee shared her

enthusiasm towards learning science.

B: I was interested in science because you learn more than just science. Like in English, I learn only English and write and speak and learn the vocab. But in science, I learn about sometime biology, sometime animal, sometime human and also the things that I never know. Like know what's inside us...it is very interesting and you need to know it.

N: Do you understand the teacher and the information he gives you?

B: Yes, sometimes when I don't get it, he just let us know what it is by drawing or showing action how it was like and also when we don't know the vocabulary, he say okay draw the picture to show you understand it and when we draw the picture you can tell if it's right or wrong. And I feel like we have more English there...we learn new word. And the thing I never know, I love to learn it. I love to learn about that (Interview with Bee, Friday, January 23, 2008).

Bee's science teacher makes the curriculum accessible to students by allowing them to draw pictures of vocabulary and concepts in order to show their understanding. As a result, Bee is not only learning science, she is expanding her English vocabulary in a meaningful way.

Kalpna and Tushar also shared their interest in learning about DNA in science class. Kalpna was excited about the incorporation of technology in their lesson on DNA.

N: Tell me about some of the projects that you've done at school that you really liked.

K: A project that I have done about science. Lab 3...about DNA I like very much. Through DNA we can know everythings. I type in the computer and I can share my view there. I like it. But it's quite hard (Interview with Kalpna, Saturday, November 15, 2008).

Due to the high interest nature of the lesson, the difficulty in understanding the content in English was not a barrier for Kalpna who was eager to learn more. Similarly, Tushar expressed his enthusiasm to learn science in a hands-on and interactive way.

N: Can you tell me some of the activities or projects that you worked on so far this year that you really liked?

T: In mathematics making survey was very interesting. And in Science making the project of DNA was very interesting. In Nepal I did not used to learn like that. In Nepal we just have to write question and answer, question and answer. But here, no. Technical knowledge is really good here but Nepal, no.

N: What do you mean about technical knowledge?

T: Just using techniques and experiments to understand something different. In Nepal we never used to learn like this.

N: So do you like this way or that way?

T: I like this way because it's better...it makes student to understand something well (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

Three students emphasized the importance of studying English. Simon admitted learning to write essays was challenging for him, but he articulated the value in being able to write.

N: What about in school...what are some of your challenges in school?

S: For me it's writing essay. If you know how to write, you can make a story book about your country and the events that passed at you. When you grow up and have your kids, you can read that story to them (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

For Simon, learning to write means being able to tell his story and leave a legacy for his children. Similarly, Thura shared he is also fond of his English class because he is not only learning a new language, but he is learning life skills.

N: Tell me about one of your classes that you really like here.

T: My favorite class is English class because everyone have to read and write and speak English.

N: Tell me about something that you did in English class that you really liked.

T: I learn about assimilation and how to preserve a culture...how to live in a new place (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Both Simon and Thura like to learn English because it has real life implications for them. Thura is learning coping skills as his family settles in the US, and Simon is learning how to document his story for future generations in his family.

In observing and talking to both teachers, I realized the lessons they presented are authentic, purposeful and flexible to meet the needs of students. The teachers use much thought when planning the lessons. I asked Ms. Shweta to talk about the process she uses in planning the lessons in her math class.

What makes me interested in teaching math is its relevance to daily life. If it's not relevant, then it's not interesting to learn...which is why I try to make as many of my activities and projects relevant to students lives as possible in the hopes that they find a way to engage with the material whether that's through the math or through the concepts. Certainly in terms of designing, we start with the California content standards and the CAHSEE. We figure out what needs to be taught in high school and then given those topics we determine the sequence and design the kinds of projects that could be taught that would be relevant and tied into those standards (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Ms. Tran also articulated how she chose to teach students the techniques of making a collage after engaging them in a high interest writing assignment in her art class.

N: Describe a project or assignment that you found to be interesting for refugee students.

T: There was a lot of excitement around the elections and I wanted them to have a chance to talk to the candidates in a letter. Most of them picked Obama and they wrote about their hopes and dreams, and problems that they see. They wrote about themselves and what they want the president to do and I was really pleasantly surprised about how much kids had to write. I wasn't expecting more than a paragraph from the newcomers, but kids wrote a page, two pages and they had a lot of detail which made me think like okay I think they like this idea that we're gonna send these letters and they want them to be read. They worked hard on their collages and I told them if you want your voice to be heard over 300 million others, what can you do to stand out? I think that they sorta took off on the idea of the collage. In the end it was a happy medium of learning basic things like background and foreground to make their collage look good, but their ideas were still present (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Many of the refugee students actually wrote about their plight and sought the incoming

president's attention on the conflict in their country. As Ms. Tran mentioned, everyone, including newcomer students, were motivated and wrote one or two page letters to President Obama. Moreover, when they began to make their collages, Ms. Tran provided magazines displaying pictures of refugees that students could cut out and use in their collages.

N: I noticed that many of the refugee students displayed things that they had experienced in their lives, did you anticipate that?

T: Well I hope that they would. And I brought some magazines especially for them cause I know it's hard to find images of life in a refugee camp in glossy magazines with cars and skinny models. So I brought in some materials from Doctors Without Borders that I had collected and really pushed them to find images that matched what they were trying to express (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Ms. Tran did not want to just teach students how to make a collage; she attached the art to a real and meaningful purpose that they were all very interested in.

### Story and Narrative

Seven students revealed they enjoyed opportunities where they either told their story or listened to their classmates' stories. Tushar discussed how his English teacher engaged the entire class by creating a safe environment where students shared their accounts.

T: When the English teacher ask about refugees, he first told about himself. Then I listen.

N: Can you tell me more about that?

T: Yeah, he ask about the difference between immigration and refugees. Then Sapo tell everyone I'm refugee and this...this...this story and then I know that he's also refugee.

N: Did everyone get a chance to tell their story?

T: Yeah it was like everybody get chance to tell their story to whole class.



N: How did you feel about that assignment?

T: I feel good...to say refugee in front of other is a bit embarrassing because all are immigrant and we are refugee. I didn't think they will treat us good if we say we are refugee.

N: Why do you say that?

T: Because it's my thinking and because refugee means people who don't know anything, who are very poor (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

By beginning the lesson with his own family's story, Tushar's English teacher was able to encourage students to feel safe to tell their stories. In addition, students had an opportunity to eliminate their stereotypes of refugees. Tushar who was hesitant to admit he is a refugee was pleasantly surprised that he is treated with the same respect by his peers and teacher after he revealed his immigration status.

Simon also talked about how he felt good because many of his teachers showed an interest to hear why his family had come to the US and created opportunities for him to share his story.

I think it's good to explain about the thing that's happening in your country because a lot of teachers in the school want to listen to why you are in America. Some students like to listen and think about what happened to this country. Because what people explain about their story, some other people have the same story. The things that happened in my country, might happened to another country. Other person explain their story and you explain your story is a good thing (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

The opportunity to share validated Simon's story narrative and helped him relate to other students, especially those with similar stories. As a result, Simon stated, "I like to write about different immigrants that come to the United States, about why immigrants are important and their culture...to remember the country that they came from." In essence, learning about others who share similar stories, Simon is able to keep his own story alive.

Akin to Simon, Thura also shared how he told his story in his English class without using many words.

In history class I talked about the problem and what happened in my country. I didn't know how to say in English. I draw the picture. The Burmese army burn the Karen house, Karen places and killed Karen people. They take their animals...a lot! (Interview with Thura, Thursday, December 11, 2008).

Even though Thura was emotional when telling his story, he found comfort in the process because his teacher and classmates showed empathy for him and the Karen people.

Both Ms. Tran and Ms. Shweta stated that they purposefully plan for opportunities for students to share their stories. Ms. Tran also shared some of her experiences in how to facilitate student stories successfully.

Well, one thing I learned last year is they feel put on the spot when you ask them about refugees, so I learned to be delicate about how I ask and how I extract information and stories from them. For example, at no point would I ask a kid to stand up and tell their story to the class. Whereas, that's something I might have clumsily done in history class last year and gotten looks like God, don't do that to me. This year, I got visual collages and some stories in writing in their letters to Obama. I found some of them are happy-go-lucky and some of them are very serious. I don't know if the seriousness is their own character or it's the surface of some very deep pain that I have to be careful around (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Ms. Tran emphasized that opportunities to tell and hear each other's stories must be done in a safe environment, through a safe medium such as art and writing.

In addition, during the collage lesson, Ms. Tran displayed several collages of refugee students on the board as models for other students.

N: Isha's collage was displayed on the board. Did you intend for that particular one to be up there and for kids to look at it and think about it?

T: Yeah the best examples are visual ones. I can explain an explain in words but if they look at other students' then it gives them ideas and they are more likely to go forward with that idea.

N: Why do you think it's important to encourage such expressions in class?

T: It's art and art is supposed to be a language you use to express who you are and how you see things. If I didn't capitalize on the fact that these kids are coming from all over, I don't think I would be a very good art teacher (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Ms. Tran has not only created opportunities to tell their story orally and in writing, but creatively through art as well.

Ms. Shweta talked about how she modeled her own narrative in the graph project in her math classes to encourage students to plot important events in their lives on their graphs.

It's interesting. I don't think I anticipated that kids would be as open as they were, but in the example that I showed for my own life...there was a point when my grandfather died when I was seven. I think using that as an example for the kids made it ok for them to include deaths or tragic events from their own lives (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Both teachers recognize sharing their own experiences and modeling student work that reflects their reality are powerful ways to engage refugee students in their education.

### Structure

Five students expressed that one of their academic needs is to have structure in school. They stated routines and procedures that are followed with regularity help them focus more on their school work. Bella was excited about the school's new color coded binder system.

I like the binder this year and it's good. Every week we check everything. If you don't have your papers you cannot get an A. Last year a lot of people threw their paper away, now we keep it in a binder (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

All students are given a binder which is sectioned according to subject and color coded according to assignment. All students are expected to bring their binder to school everyday, and teachers monitor student work in their binders every period.

In addition, Ms. Tran and Ms. Shweta confirmed that creating classroom and school-wide routines and following up with students have been very useful practices with refugee students. Ms. Tran admitted she was not always a proponent of repetition, but she has adjusted her perception to meet the academic needs of her students.

N: How do you meet the academic needs of refugee students in your classes?

T: I give them a lot of chances to speak, read and write. I also make sure there is a routine or repeated activities. I never used to be such a stickler for Do Nows, objectives, agendas and similar homework every night. But that kind of repetition helps kids be able to do it. Having vocabulary with definitions on the wall really seems to help them retain the vocabulary. Making sure that they are doing their homework...when I have a Karen Student who is not turning homework in for a week, I know that I'm not explaining something very well, because there are kids who do the homework if they understand it. Also keeping in touch with other teachers helps cause then we can have routines going through many classes. As for the kids who have had interrupted formal education, building good work habits is really important so that they know where to keep their work and they know that they're expected to organize and review their work and it's not just about handing in something one time and you don't think about it anymore (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Similarly, Ms. Shweta highlighted routines such as modeling tasks and giving students think time before providing students with the answer.

But definitely for students with interrupted formal education, we give examples and models for what we want them to do...that's huge! Giving them a lot of wait time...time to come to their own answer instead of trying to force a technique or answer upon them. I've definitely found that a lot of our refugee students last year who may have been more quiet or less engaged in the school work are able to do a lot more this year. They may not be at the top of the class yet, but they sort of understand the routines that we've set which is another huge thing in the expectations for their behavior (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Both teachers agree that establishing routines is one way all students can feel successful regardless of their level of English acquisition.

#### Teachers and Community Support After School

Six students mentioned they need support after school and showed appreciation

for teachers and onsite tutoring that are available to help them. Casandra revealed she is able to succeed because her teachers are accessible after school.

N: You said you feel supported by your teachers...tell me more about that.

C: Like when you don't understand what they teach, they'll be like talk to me after school. Sometimes I go after school but sometimes my friend shows me too. Sometimes if we're taking a quiz and the students are too noisy, I tell my teacher I wanna take the quiz during lunchtime. Then I take it at lunch and get like a B or something (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

As someone who has had a huge gap in her education, Casandra needs the afterschool support. Moreover, her teacher's flexibility in allowing her to take a test at a time when she can concentrate more fully is imperative in Casandra's academic success.

Ms. Shweta explained the tutoring program offered to students after school is sponsored by a refugee resettlement organization called Refugee Transitions.

We have a tutoring program that is actually staffed by Refugee Transitions and we have several languages represented in the tutoring staff. The tutors are here Monday through Thursday after school. In the beginning of the school, we made a big push to get kids who really needed it signed up for a specific day and get teachers to pull kids out of class at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> period to walk them over to tutoring (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Ms. Shweta explained in addition to the after school support on site, Refugee Transitions also has home based tutors who meet with some of the refugee students once a week to help them with homework, English and life skills.

The academic needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School require teacher knowledge and collaboration as well as incorporation of relevant curriculum, story/narrative, structure, school and community support both in the classroom and on campus.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The findings in Chapter V showed that the educational experiences of refugee students vary widely and are defined by their families' socio-political and economic status as well as the political state of the native country, refugee camp and/or host country. The themes of adversity and poverty pre- and post- arrival, fragmented schooling as well as motivation and hope, emerged in analyzing the data on the educational experiences of students at South Palm International High School. In addition, loss, nostalgia, fear, PTSD, culture shock, safety, and community surfaced in examining the data for their emotional and psychological needs. Finally in investigating refugee students' academic needs, the importance of teacher knowledge and collaboration and the use of story/narrative surfaced.

As a result of these findings, this study provides insight into refugee students' educational experiences and emotional/psychological needs as well as practices that promote their success in education. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to the research literature, offer recommendations for future research and practice, and present a final conclusion.

#### Discussion

##### The Educational Experiences of Refugee Students

Everyday refugee children enter a US public school for the first time bringing with them a treasure of culture, language, life and educational experience which may be impacted by fragmented schooling and grave poverty due to political unrest in their native countries. In my research, I found despite the adversity in their lives prior to and

post arrival in the US, all ten students and the two teachers are nevertheless quite optimistic about the future.

### *Adversity and Poverty*

Nine students revealed that poverty and adversity in their native country and/or a refugee camp hindered their access to education. Of those, five described their schooling in substandard conditions, such as overcrowded classes with lack of basic supplies and furniture. Two students stated they began working as children in order to help support their families in the refugee camps. One student enrolled in school for the first time when he was nine years old in a refugee camp. Four students enrolled in school for the first time in their lives as adolescents after their arrival in the US.

Suárez-Orozco (1989) studied 50 poor and lower middle class Central American refugee youth from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua who had been in the US for fewer than five years through an ethnographic lens. He also uncovered difficulties that the youth faced as they left violent, war-torn countries. In contrast to the refugee students in my study, his student informants were not accepted as refugees by the United States and resided illegally in the country.

Additionally, the students in Suárez-Orozco's (1989) study faced numerous challenges at school. Many of the students had been in advanced courses in their native countries, but they were inappropriately placed in low-level classes in their US schools. Counselors did not place the students in college preparation tracks, despite their ambitions and capabilities. Many of the students worked full-time jobs while attending high school. Although they worked hard to succeed, they were often discouraged by negative attitudes encountered at school and by exhaustion as they worked long hours to

pay for food and shelter while they attempted to keep up with their school work.

*Motivation and Hope*

Despite all the barriers in their experiences with education, all ten students in my study expressed motivation at school and a sense of hope for their future in the US.

Suárez-Orozco (1989) also highlighted a “dual perspective in the immigrant’s mind” (p. 97) where refugee students and their parents pointed out that regardless of the problems of gang violence, drugs, overcrowded classrooms, and burned out teachers and counselors, schooling was more accessible and fair in the US than it had been in their native countries.

A dream to achieve a better tomorrow through self sacrifice has enabled many of the recent arrivals to endure marginality (legal, economic, linguistic, etc.) and to move toward attempts to succeed despite the unfavorable climate of the American inner city (p. 47).

Consequently, students’ harsh life and academic experiences fueled their determination to succeed in the US.

Similarly, the student participants at South Palm International High also exuded a motivation to succeed stemming from their lack of educational opportunity prior to arrival in the US. In both cases, refugee students are thirsty for an education. Their prior academic experiences did not circumscribe their determination to graduate from high school and enroll in college. Eight out of the ten student participants declared they saw themselves in college five years from now. Four out of those eight students had not attended primary school in their native country and went to school for the first time after arrival in the US. Tushar articulated his motivation to improve his life in the US with simple, yet eloquent words.

My history is bad...I was born in Bhutan. I grew up in refugee camp, and now



I'm in US. My dream is do something in future. I don't know what that is. But I will accept everything because we have to be satisfied with what we have. First, I want to go university (Interview with Tushar, Tuesday, November 25, 2008).

### *School Community*

Despite some similarities between the students' grappling with adversity, one of the biggest differences between Suarez Orozco's (1989) subjects and the students at South Palm International High was the school community. Whereas Suarez Orozco's study was in a large urban campus with hundreds of students, South Palm International was a much smaller school focused on meeting the needs of relatively new immigrant and refugee students. In addition, the handful of teachers and staff members at South Palm International High were expected and encouraged to investigate the life and educational experiences of every child. I was surprised, that even Ms. Gonzales, the school secretary, could easily look at a list of all the students and distinguish the refugee students from the immigrant students (Researcher's journal, October 15, 2008).

Six students in my study mentioned they took advantage of the ongoing tutoring and teacher support after school and showed appreciation for the assistance. Casandra revealed she was able to succeed because her teachers were accessible after school.

N: You said you feel supported by your teachers...tell me more about that.

C: Like when you don't understand what they teach, they'll be like talk to me after school. Sometimes I go after school but sometimes my friend shows me too. Sometimes if we're taking a quiz and the students are too noisy, I tell my teacher I wanna take the quiz during lunchtime. Then I take it at lunch and get like a B or something (Interview with Casandra, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

As someone who has had a huge gap in her education, Casandra needed the afterschool support. Moreover, her teacher's flexibility in allowing her to take a test at a time when she could concentrate more fully was imperative for Casandra's academic success.

Igoa (1995) advises teacher knowledge about each child's background is crucial to the well-being of a student. Moreover, she contends without knowing the context of how a child grew up, a teacher cannot accommodate students' values, goals, and interests, to authentically engage them in the process of education. She insists a teacher can gain powerful knowledge about the life of each student through inquiry and genuine dialogue. As she writes about her experience of encouraging her students to make creative films, Igoa discovers they frequently contain themes of being tired, confused, and lonely-all symptoms of being overwhelmed by adjusting to a new culture. Therefore, she maintains it is critical for teachers to validate the individual history and background that each child brings to school. Moreover, Igoa cautions, without the aid of an understanding, encouraging, and insightful teacher, many immigrant children are doomed to lives of alienation, both from their new culture and their old.

Consequently, I was not surprised when both Ms. Shweta and Ms. Tran articulated a thorough knowledge of each refugee student's prior academic experiences, an awareness of the political instabilities in their countries and some details about life in the refugee camps. They had gathered their information from a refugee resettlement agency, through personal research, and most importantly, from the students themselves. Both teachers mentioned having implemented at least one assignment in which students wrote, drew, and or talked about their academic experiences prior to arriving in the US.

#### Emotional and Psychological Needs of Refugee Students

The psychological and emotional needs of refugee students depend on the degree of involvement in or witnessing of violence as well as the age of the child when traumatic events unfolded and/or resettlement occurred. Other influential variables include the

level of family support, safety, and community in the arrival country. Refugee children experience lifelong impairments to their mental health, physical well-being and moral development as a result of exposure to violent and traumatic events (Berthold, 1999, Blackwell, 2000, Kaplan, 2002, Spencer and Le, 2006). In analyzing the data for emotional and psychological needs of refugee students at South Palm International School, the students' experiences with trauma and PTSD, fear, and culture shock emerged first, followed by their needs for safety, structure and community.

### *Trauma and PTSD*

In my study, seven students described having been exposed to extreme fear either in their home country or the refugee camp before their arrival to the US. Given the trauma all ten students were exposed to, they may be suffering from PTSD. Kaplan (2002) notes the factors which contribute to the development of PTSD in children and adolescents include the severity of trauma, parental reaction to the trauma and the proximity of the trauma. Ms. Tran shared her observation of Simon's unusual reaction to a fight at school and his ongoing grapple to focus in class.

T: He's had some really strange reactions to things that just make you question.

N: Like what?

T: Like when there was a huge fight in my classroom and I had to get all the students out because it was getting out of control, he was totally un-phased and wouldn't budge. And later on when I asked him about it...I was like I was screaming at you to leave and why didn't you leave? And he was like I had to organize my binder. And the day I was really upset about thefts on campus and I told him I had cried, he was like don't cry, be happy!! He was like yelling at me. So, unexpected reactions to emotional situations. And academically he has major trouble in reading and recalling information (Interview with Ms. Tran, November 2, 2007).

Simon's detachment from others during a violent action in class and his difficulties

concentrating on academic tasks can be considered as clear signs of PTSD.

However, it is important to note refugees come from a wide range of cultures, have had varied experiences, and present their emotional and psychological needs and difficulties in a variety of ways. Studies have shown that PTSD manifests itself differently amongst individuals and groups of students (Masser, 1992; Blackwell, 2000). They emphasize the importance of not categorizing everyone: that although some victims may appear to manage the academic side of school quite well, they may be suffering from depression or PTSD. In a cross sectional study of 76 Khmer refugee adolescents living in violence-ridden inner cities in western United States, Berthold (1999) found exposure to community violence in the US is strongly associated with PTSD. Berthold suggests despite the fact that the adolescents in his study were exposed to violent events in Cambodia and in refugee camps, the number of violent events that they encounter in their inner city neighborhoods in the United States may have an even greater impact on their level of well being.

### *Fear and Safety*

Noguera (2003) declares “It is widely recognized that many urban public schools are places that should be avoided because they are dangerous, chaotic and potentially dangerous to those who go there” (p. 15). Although all ten students in my study reported they felt safe at their current school, five students admitted they did not feel safe in their neighborhood in South Palm. Isha was terrified of his current neighborhood because approximately three months ago he was attacked by a group of African American boys as he waited for the bus at the bus stop.

N: Do you feel safe at your neighborhood in South Palm?

I: I worry about all the people like I get...I scare about black people because when I was in bus stop, they beat me last time. I was sitting simply. They check my pockets and see I don't have anything. Then they beat me. I was with my brother and they beat me. I was waiting for bus. I don't know which school they go, but they go this way. First time they are three, when I go to second time, they are group...many many. I change the bus now. I have four route to go to school and I change the bus route. I don't see them anymore (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Isha felt very vulnerable in his new neighborhood where neither he nor his family knew who to turn to for protection. Suárez-Orozco (1989) confirms Isha's feelings stating, "resettling in the most modern country in the world without knowledge of the language, the code of behavior, or a wide array of new cultural symbols evokes a sense of inadequacy in the immigrants as they face the task of survival" (p. 111).

Yosra also shared her family's vulnerability and fear living in her crime infested urban neighborhood. She narrated how her pregnant cousin was assaulted as she walked to a store in order to purchase groceries.

N: What do you think about your neighborhood?

Y: I think it's a dangerous place cause many people and many groups and gangs and it's dirty. When you cross the street, someone yell something. It happened to my cousin. She was pregnant and it was raining. She was walking to the store. She was like 8 or 7 months pregnant. He started beating her. And then she started screaming. Nobody help. And then I don't know what happen. She falled down on the floor and they took her to the hospital. Nobody know who that was and why...I don't know why...no reason, just come and beat her (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009).

Yosra's family had been discriminated against for three generations and ousted from three different countries. They were promised a refuge post resettlement in the US, but unfortunately, Yosra and her family were still at risk and defenseless in urban America.

Suárez-Orozco (1989) in his study of Central American refugee students also

notes many new arrivals reported being mugged and brutally beaten by drug pushers and gang members in their neighborhoods and at school. Unlike my study where all ten students reported feeling safe at school, Suárez-Orozco found that violence was one of the most common things students did not like about their new school. Akin to my study, Suárez-Orozco highlights the irony in the fact that the refugees had escaped wars only to find themselves in the middle of an urban war in the US. He writes “many of the same families who had reported escaping political violence in Central America were being terrorized by gang and sexual violence in inner city” (p. 91).

In addition to fearing for their safety, newcomers often encounter discrimination and racism because of race, ethnicity, religion, or cultural differences, (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In my study, five students revealed instances where they were discriminated against outside of South Palm International School. Igoa (1995) maintains if a child cannot handle the fear of discrimination, he/she cannot make a healthy cultural transition. Moreover, the student will often try to bury their cultural past, resulting in a loss of identity, which is damaging for life.

Fabiola, who enrolled in school for the first time in her life in middle school in the US, recalled negative experiences with racism at her former school.

N: What do you think about this school?

F: I think this school is good.

N: Yeah? What are some things you like about it?

F: Things like we're all together and like no bullying cause in my middle school I used to go to, they used to say you need to go back to Africa. Here, like everybody from different part of the world, so I feel much better (Interview with Fabiola, Friday, November 21, 2008).

Fabiola expressed feeling safer at South Palm International High School where all students are foreigners and no one tells anyone to go back to where he/she came from.

### *Culture Shock*

Although all ten students reported they had friends and were happy at South Palm International School, eight expressed feeling alarmed and disturbed by the culture of disrespect in their current school versus their previous school overseas. Students articulated their discontent with students' behavior in class, referring to teachers by their first name and lack of uniforms in school. Suárez-Orozco (1989) in his study of Central American refugee students, also found the students could not comprehend the lack of discipline and respect for the teacher in the inner-city classroom. In fact, the students in his study revealed one of the things they liked least about their current school was "the other students' insolence and disrespect of other students towards the teacher" (p. 44).

Isha complained about the lack of respect and the disregard of teachers in his classes and articulated his discomfort in referring to teachers by their first names.

I: In the US, I didn't see the respect between the teacher and student but in Nepal I used to see respect.

N: How do students behave with the teacher in Nepal?

I: The teachers treat us in good manner and we used to respect them. In the US...there's a ...I don't know. It's different. I don't like to call my teacher by their first name. There, I used to tell my friend to call (get the attention of) the teacher and he used to call the teacher. I don't like to call the teacher by name...only Miss or Mr. (Interview with Isha, Monday, November 24, 2008).

Isha and other students struggle with the different, often opposing, teaching styles and the way teachers exercise authority in their native culture versus in the US. Yosra shared some of her frustration in experiencing this immense variation between schooling

in Russia and the US.

Y: Sometimes I feel bad because no respect. I feel bad because the teacher feel bad. In Russia we used to never say anything to the teacher. When the teacher get in the class, we have to stand up. If you have question, you raise your hand. But here, no...you can yell, scream, everything. In Russia... no! They respect all teachers. They don't make attitude. But here...zero! They talk to older people same as their age and that's what I don't like.

N: Would it help you if the teachers were stricter?

Y: Yes, because nobody talks nobody disrupts (Interview with Yosra, Tuesday, February 17, 2009).

Like Suarez Orozco's (1989) study, I found refugee students at South Palm International High School did not understand the lenient discipline policy in school and their classroom, expected greater initiative from staff, and welcomed stricter directives.

#### Academic Needs of Refugee Students

The academic needs of refugee students at South Palm International High School also varied depending on their prior educational experiences. However, teacher knowledge and collaboration, and the incorporation of story and narrative were pertinent components of the data. The voices of teachers were particularly strong in this section illustrating their immense knowledge of the academic needs of their students.

#### *Teacher Knowledge and Collaboration*

Suárez-Orozco (1991) maintains it is important to understand the educational experiences and needs of immigrant children because recent immigrants are shaping a new "socio-geographical landscape" which they ultimately affect the future of our society, both socially and economically (p. 38). Consequently, the less educators know about meeting the needs of these students, the more likely these students are to become alienated from the education system and drop out of school.



In my study both teachers were well informed about the academic history and current needs of refugee students. Ms. Shweta differentiated her math lessons to match the English acquisition levels of the students. Recognizing the value in proper student placement in every class, she also developed a non-English dependent math assessment. Ms. Shweta's assessment is given to all students at the time of enrollment and helps place them in an appropriate math class regardless of their English language skills.

Unlike Lee's (2002) examination of Hmong refugees in a Wisconsin high school where mainstream teachers felt no responsibility for the Hmong students, both mainstream teachers in my study took the time to plan meaningful and relevant lessons. In observing and talking to both teachers, the lessons they presented were authentic, purposeful and flexible to meet the needs of students. The teachers used much thought when planning the lessons. I asked Ms. Shweta about her lesson planning process.

What makes me interested in teaching math is its relevance to daily life. If it's not relevant, then it's not interesting to learn...which is why I try to make as many of my activities and projects relevant to students lives as possible in the hopes that they find a way to engage with the material whether that's through the math or through the concepts. Certainly in terms of designing, we start with the California content standards and the CAHSEE. We figure out what needs to be taught in high school and then given those topics we determine the sequence and design the kinds of projects that could be taught that would be relevant and tied into those standards (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

Ms. Tran also showed planning for and inclusion of refugee students in her collage lesson. She used a shirt design depicting the refugee cause from Doctors Without Borders to encourage participation and safety in self expression for refugee students. She also provided magazines with images of refugees around the world for students to use in their collages.

N: I noticed that many of the refugee students displayed things that they had experienced in their lives, did you anticipate that?

T: Well I hope that they would. And I brought some magazines especially for them cause I know it's hard to find images of life in a refugee camp in glossy magazines with cars and skinny models. So I brought in some materials from Doctors Without Borders that I had collected and really pushed them to find images that matched what they were trying to express (Interview with Ms. Tran, Thursday, December 18, 2008).

Ms. Tran did not want to simply teach students how to make a collage; she attached the art to a real and meaningful purpose in which they were all very interested. As a result, several of the students expressed their thoughts and emotions about the refugee experience.

In addition to thoughtful planning, both teachers collaborated from time to time in order to expand a lesson across two different subjects. Ms. Shweta noted both teachers assigned students to create a timeline of their lives in Ms. Tran's class and then used the timeline in her class to graph them.

We got really interesting information from the kids about when kids crossed over to the US illegally or when someone in their family who is very important to them died. I know one of our refugee students almost his entire family was killed by the Burmese army. So that was one of the points on his graph. You know...so lots of kids used the graph or the timeline to mark events in their life that were especially traumatic or especially happy (Interview with Ms. Shweta, Thursday, December 4, 2008).

The partnership between Ms. Tran and Ms. Shweta resulted in meaningful lessons in both math and history classes where refugee students were not only challenged to engage in a rigorous assignment, but they also felt safe to share some of the traumatic events in their lives with their classmates.

### *Story and Narrative*

Drake and Ryan (1994) proclaim that the best way to account for the diversity represented in our classrooms is to create an inclusive type of education that can give

voice to all students. They state, “A narrative format allows students to present views of the world that are not necessarily filtered through a perspective that assumes a uniformity of experience” (p. 49).

Seven students in my study stated they were encouraged by their teachers to learn about each other. Simon was excited that his teachers asked and created a safe environment for him to narrate why his family sought refuge in the US. He articulated the value of such learning opportunities.

I think it's good to explain about the thing that's happening in your country because a lot of teachers in the school want to listen to why you are in America. Some students like to listen and think about what happened to this country. Because what people explain about their story, some other people have the same story. The things that happened in my country, might happened to another country. Other person explain their story and you explain your story is a good thing (Interview with Simon, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

The opportunity to share his story validated Simon's experience and helped him relate to other students, especially those with similar stories. In essence, by learning about others who share similar stories, Simon was able to keep his own story alive.

In contrast, Lee's (2002) study revealed that teachers at a Wisconsin high school determined the Hmong to be not only educationally different but deficient and inferior to mainstream students. In addition, some ethnocentric teachers described the Hmong culture as preliterate, clannish, and rural. As a result, some students also characterized Hmong students as culturally deficient.

Igoa (1995) in her work with immigrant and refugee students emphasizes the importance of narrative in teaching immigrant and refugee students. She explains

For academic reasons, students need to know how to report, search for information, organize material, read, summarize, paraphrase, and write. For cultural reasons, children need to experience a sense of continuity through the retelling of their histories and religion as well as their expressions in language, art

and music. For psychological reasons, students need to have a place to make statements about their feelings and beliefs” (p. 174).

Igoa stresses educators must see each student through a Cultural, Academic and Psychological (CAP) lens in order to facilitate the child’s maintenance of authenticity and connection to his or her native culture, academic achievement, and sense of feeling fully present in school. She maintains this three dimensional approach nurtures an empowering environment where students internalize a sense of confidence that generates purposeful action.

In my study, students indicated their interest in opportunities to reveal themselves to their new world by telling and or writing their stories and hearing other students’ stories in class. Bella articulated her thoughts and feelings about narrative.

I feel so quiet...I want to listen to their story. I don’t say nothing if they are saying something because I remember everything about my country and after they finish, I say that one happened to my country...this one happened to my country. And I say it’s a little bit different from your country. So if they are talking about their story I just be quiet and listen to it. Sooo quiet. I write a little bit about what they are talking about. I write some to add it to my own story because it’s a little bit the same. So I like to be quiet when people tell their story (Interview with Bella, Tuesday, December 2, 2008).

Bella liked to listen to her classmates’ stories because in their stories she found patterns that helped her understand her own experiences and reality. Through narrative, refugee students achieve a sense of authenticity in their native culture when there are ample opportunities for them to reflect on and share their prior and current experiences to define and redefine their identities.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Some dimensions that could be added to my study include a comparison between refugee students at South Palm International School and another high school in the same

district in order to contrast and evaluate refugee student experiences at different school settings. Another way my study could be enhanced is by extending the length of data collection to a longitudinal study in order to capture a broader scope of student experiences. Observation of the student participants throughout the day, including lunchtime and afterschool, would provide more information about their socialization and participation in different settings. In addition, ethnographic research of families from each refugee community could be conducted to capture the alteration of family dynamics and their influence on the children's schooling. Participatory research could also be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how refugee students view themselves as a group in relation to their school community.

Much of the research on refugee students in the US is subsumed under immigrant populations. Therefore, there is an immense need for extensive and longitudinal studies of refugee students. Additionally, I found no literature that systematically compared differences between groups of immigrants and refugees in schools. Moreover, an insufficient amount of literature separates the experiences and needs of immigrant students in general from the experiences and needs of refugee students. Thus, new research is needed on refugee students as a distinct category.

Most studies using segmented assimilation as a theoretical framework focus on the experiences of second-generation immigrants and beyond. More research is needed on segmented assimilation as it pertains to refugees and refugee students. Furthermore, research comparing the immersion of refugees with a higher socio-economic status in their homeland versus refugees who were poor in the native country is lacking. It is important to study the impact of prior social capital on fragmented assimilation.

Additionally, ethnographic research giving educators insight into the lives of refugee students including their experiences and interaction with their family, school and community would be helpful. I also did not find any comparative studies between the experiences of refugee students in a small school versus a large urban school. The literature on refugee children and adolescents does not specify ways to enhance refugee students' academic achievement in required school subjects such as math, science and language arts. This area would also benefit from new research. Without comparative studies, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers have no valid or reliable information to provide relevant services ensuring the success of refugee students.

#### Recommendations for Practice

Educators must know about refugee students' native countries as well as the history and politics of their native country. It is also pertinent to become aware of the students' past experiences, home environment, and culture in order to gain a full understanding of the students' world. One way teacher-researchers can achieve this is through conducting ethnographic research. Hones (2002) reported his students, who were teachers completing graduate work, chose to research families from Laos, Mexico, Kurdistan, and Kosovo. As a result, the teachers reported transformations in their own attitudes, in terms of their empathy with and respect for the families with whom they became acquainted. With in depth understanding of the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of refugee students, teachers will be able to incorporate students' prior experiences and knowledge in their lessons making schooling relevant and meaningful.

Numerous factors come into play on deciding how to go about teaching a refugee student, and filling some of the educational gaps that may exist. Igoa (1995) lists a series

of questions she asks herself as the teacher.

- Were the children schools or unschooled before they came into the country?
- Was their education fragmented?
- Are the children dependent on the teacher for learning? Do they have any independent learning skills?
- How much of their own language did they learn?
- Did they learn any English abroad?
- What is the status of the parents? Was there clear communication between school and home?

I would also add the following to Igoa's list of proposed questions to account for the differences between immigrant and refugee students:

- Which country did the student come from? What is the political history of that country?
- To what extent was the student exposed to war and trauma?
- What is the resettlement organization assisting the family and what services do they provide?
- To what extent is the family intact? Are there members who are left behind either in a refugee camp or the country of origin?
- What are some critical cultural beliefs and religious practices of the family and community?

Attempting to teach a group of immigrant students in an all-encompassing, formulaic method simply does not work. Knowing the answers to these questions and questions of similar nature is absolutely imperative to teaching and creating a nurturing and empowering class and school environment.

### Conclusion

The United States federal government has provided legal entry into the country and offered resettlement assistance, temporary welfare programs, and subsidized housing

to refugee students in my study. These benefits may have offered some of the necessary elements for a smooth transition into urban America. However, the characteristics of the contemporary refugee community in South Palm (i.e. their lack of social, economic and political capital) and the stratified nature of American society produce a prejudiced societal reception of refugees.

According to Portes and Zhou's (1993) Segmented Assimilation theory, an immigrant group's mode of incorporation is determined by an interaction between governmental policy, societal reception, and the strength of the co-ethnic community. The interaction dictates three forms of adaptation for the second generation, including assimilation and acculturation into the white middle class, assimilation into poverty in the underclass, and preservation of immigrant values with economic prosperity.

My study observed some of the educational experiences and the emotional/psychological needs of refugee students as they grappled through systemic barriers that had the potential to prevent their upward socioeconomic mobility in the future generations. Inclusive practices and structures at South Palm International High School were facilitating the social and academic antecedents necessary for these students to rise above the seemingly eminent force of downward assimilation. By providing a safe, caring and rigorous educational community, this school provided social capital for refugee students who were otherwise likely to be underserved in other schools in the large urban district. Yet, since my field research for this study occurred within fewer than four years of the first generation refugees' arrival to the United States, firm conclusions about their ultimate mode of incorporation into American society cannot be drawn.



Our challenge, as educators, is to identify the elements of an oppressive education system and create a vibrant environment of liberation in which each student has a critical perception of their world and a clear voice. According to Freire (1970), a liberatory education encourages learners to challenge and change the world, and not merely adapt themselves to it. If we are to contest our oppressive cultural hegemony, we must challenge the ideological framework that supports the structure of power and inequality in the U.S. We must create classroom and school communities, such as South Palm International High, that serve as social capital to students who have endured incredibly arduous journeys to seek refuge in America.

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